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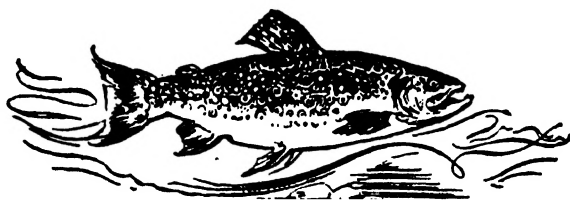
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*THE NOTES AND LETTERS*  
*of*  
*THEODORE GORDON*

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EDITED WITH AN  
INTRODUCTION  
BY  
JOHN McDONALD

JONATHAN CAPE • LONDON

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THIS BOOK GREW out of an article on trout flies which I wrote in the May, 1946, issue of *Fortune* magazine. I am therefore first of all indebted to the editors of *Fortune*, in particular to Ralph Delahaye Paine, and to publisher William Geer, for their courtesy in releasing the research to me, along with the original article itself, much of which is included in the introduction to this book. The article was favored by the sympathetic and valuable editing of my good friend and colleague, Wilder Hobson. For the Gordon-Skues letters I am indebted to their recipient, the celebrated English angler, G. E. M. Skues. These letters were turned over to the Anglers Club of New York more than twenty years ago and in some confusion between sender and receiver the originals were eventually lost. Thanks to the foresight of Otto C. v. Kienbusch, the letters were transcribed and a copy faithfully kept in Mr. Kienbusch's private angling library in New York. I am grateful for his generosity in making them available for this work. Roy Steenrod of Liberty, New York, and Guy Jenkins of New York City, two of Gordon's old friends, made available their treasured batches of letters along with good comment. I wish to thank the editors of *The Fishing Gazette* and *Field and Stream* (successor to *Forest and Stream*) for their cooperation. And there are others too whom I must thank in person.





TO LEIBHARDT

*Though it is in Ulster County*







## INTRODUCTION

By JOHN McDONALD

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THE BEST THING about Gordon is that he wrote well and with remarkable knowledge about contemporary fly-fishing. As the principal creator of the structure and style of the American, imitation trout fly, and the one who introduced and adapted the dry fly to the U. S., he also occupies a unique position in the sport. This historical connection gives his work—despite the fact that he died in 1915—an authentic intimacy with our present practices. For it was he who developed much of what we now do. Time moves slowly in fly-fishing. The last time it moved appreciably in the U. S. was with Theodore Gordon.

Gordon was a flytier as well a fly-fisherman and a journalist of the stream. His rare dedication to the sport came about by virtue of an illness that barred him from the conventional life of a stockbroker and kept him in the mountains. That at any rate was his excuse for giving his good mind exclusively for many years to the subject of fly-fishing. Gordon first appeared on the scene in the late nineteenth century in an English journal, the *Fishing Gazette*, and until his death was widely regarded here and in England as the leading American angling authority (in fishing, "authority" is a manner of speaking). Since then Gordon has become legendary. Few fly fishermen today are directly familiar with his work. I trust that some of them will find it both useful and pleasing to rediscover him in these notes and letters.

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Gordon's work speaks for itself and since I have put it together for reading pleasure rather than for the more complicated interests of criticism or scholarship, there is little that I want to say about the text. I should like, however, to try to describe the fly-fishing situation in which Gordon appears—particularly with reference to the trout fly.

On the stream, the fly-fisher makes his own history. Off the stream, his talk about flies opens a treasure box of antiquity, full of fish stories, views of embattled theorists, memories of immortal fly-fishers and all the numberless books that have made fly-fishing the most literary of sports. The trout fly of today grew out of the trout fly of yesterday. From a dim background in medieval France and Renaissance England, it has had a line of development and a breakdown into schools of thought from which the flies of today take their character.

Fly-fishing has three elements: equipment, knowledge of stream life, and presentation. The equipment centers on the artificial fly; knowledge of stream life encompasses insects and trout; presentation is skill, acquired and magical, in presenting the fly to the trout. Fly-fishing argument, which is fabulous, revolves around the comparative value of these elements. At the heart of the argument is the trout fly, its patterns and forms giving tangible expression to fly-fishing theory. Most trout flies are "imitation," resembling natural insects, or "fancy," resembling in their abstract patterns merely the generality of insect life.

In its classic form, the trout fly is modeled on an insect. Like an insect, it has, in full regalia, wings, body, legs (called "hackles"), and tail. Trout-fly fishing began, according to the lore, in antiquity, when some angler, seeing a fish rise up to take an insect off the water, dropped his worm and tried to use an insect as bait. It did not work, of course, the insect being too fragile to remain on the hook under the required conditions of casting and manipulation—and so began the historic, irreconcilable split between fly and bait fishing. (The exceptions to these are "dapping," a little-known, delicate art of fishing with natural flies, and occasional plain bait fishing with the heavy stonefly.) Certain bird feathers were found to be similar to insects in

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color, marking, texture, and weight. Tying a feather on a hook to represent insect wings, spreading the fibers of another as legs, attaching strands of the fiber for the tail, and winding fur around the hook for the body, the ancient anglers produced a sufficiently delicate yet sturdy likeness of an insect.

The trout fly is either wet or dry. The wet fly is relatively flat, two-dimensional, with soft flowing hackle. It is fished literally *wet*, that is, below the surface. The dry fly is three-dimensional and can be stood up on its stiff hackle and tail. It is fished literally *dry*, often with the aid of waterproofing, and cocks up like an insect on the water. The dry fly is almost always fished upstream (ordinarily it would quickly drag, downstream); the wet fly is fished up, down, or across. Once the subject of controversy, both the wet and dry fly are now generally found in the equipment of the sophisticated angler.

The angler's problem today, as always, is in his choice of flies. Most fly-fishers use only a small number, perhaps not more than fifteen or twenty. But which ones and why? Some 500 *standard* patterns in the U.S. are listed by the *Sporting Goods Dealer*. Mary Orvis Marbury (*Favorite Flies and Their Histories*), member of a celebrated flytying family of Vermont, fifty years ago expressed "perplexity" and "dismay" at the "accumulation of the ages"—and that was before the dry fly was really known in the U.S. Today it accounts for probably half of our trout flies. Standard and nonstandard patterns together run into thousands.

This number and diversity represent various approaches to fly-fishing. Every new thought or method has inspired new flies, even where conditions have remained constant, as in the chalk streams of southern England. Consider then the provocative inconstancy of the North American continent and its inhabitants; its waters wild and domestic, fast and slow, high and low, varying in altitude, temperature, food supply, and species of trout; its regional habits grooved in fishing traditions expressed by the fancy yellow-white-scarlet Parmachenee Belle fly of Maine, the precise, subtle, bronze-blue-gray Quill Gordon of the middle Atlantic states, the roughly delicate, mottled brown-and-gray Adams of Michigan, or the coarse, durable, hair-woven Mite family, a relatively conservative symbol of the West.

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Grafted to these natural vagaries of flytying is a wide-spread commercial exploitation of patent-medicine fishing with sure-kill fabrications. The important thing for the angler is to understand enough about fly theory to know what he is doing. A million flies will not confuse the sound angler. He begins where fly-fishing began, with nature.

### IMITATION OF THE NATURAL

The relationship of trout flies to natural insects is the rule, the first principle of fly-fishing—exceptions afterward. The primary food of the trout is the insect life of the stream. Underwater food has been called the trout's beef, the winged fly its caviar. And it may be so, for many fishermen have seen that a trout taken on a fly may already be full to bursting—an experience that suggests that the trout may have either a sporting or an epicurean instinct, in addition to ordinary hunger. This observation may serve also as a tip that fly-fishing information is highly speculative.

Early fly-fishers pioneered loosely in entomology, vaguely studying insect forms and colors. Science later identified insects by form in black and white. The fly-fisher, with his special interest in color, could have paid more attention to scientific method, for he got himself into such an unholy mess with his beautiful language of watery duns, pale evening duns, hare's ears, and March browns that he was not able to speak clearly across the centuries, as the scientists do with their Latin and Greek, or even across the Atlantic or between the states.

The big five of trout-stream insects—the mayfly, caddis fly, stonefly, true fly, and alderfly—and their several stages of life are not of equal value to the fisher. In their pre-adult stages (nymphs or larvae), these insects live under water where their herbivorous appetite performs the service of converting plant into animal life. The stream bed is generally littered with larvae and nymphs, and trout spend most of the year rooting among them for the better part of their food. In recent years fly-fishers have shown an increased interest in the nymph, and the wet fly is thought often to be taken by the trout for a nymph or a minnow rather than a winged insect. The chief interest of fly-fishers, however, is in the adult, winged flies that appear in the spring

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and summer, especially between the lilac and the laurel, the heart of the fly-fisher's season. Most trout flies represent winged insects.

Two groups of winged flies are favored most by the trout, the mayfly and caddis fly. The latter, unfortunately; does most of its hatching near or after nightfall, and is therefore usually on the stream after the fly-fisher has gone home. And so, beyond but by no means to the exclusion of all others, the trout fisher has traditionally prized and copied the gorgeously hued aristocrat of the stream, the mayfly. The mayfly lives most of its life of a few weeks to more than year under water, as a nymph, and gets its scientific name, *Ephemeroptera*, from its fleeting adult life. As an adult it has two further stages of life: the fly-fisher's dun (science: subimago) and spinner (imago). Sometime in the fly-fishers' season the mayfly nymph makes a dash for the surface, often with a trout in swift pursuit, splits the nymphal shuck, airs its wings, and takes off for the woods, a dun. In this form, the fly-fisher knows many species. Some fly-fishers prefer the dun to all others, as it is found so frequently on the stream. The dun is a great and historic fly, progenitor of countless trout-fly patterns. Hills (*A History of Fly Fishing for Trout*) has traced the artificial duns of Berners' ancient treatise down the centuries to the present time. The dun is out again in profusion each month of May.

After spending a few hours or days in nearby trees, the mayfly dun molts and is transformed into a spinner, more brilliant than the dun and slightly altered in size and shape. The spinner returns to hover over the stream in a rhythmic mating dance of birth and death. Before the end the female deposits her eggs in the water, caviar in truth for the trout.

Duns and spinners vary by country, region, stream, and season. Fly-fishers often get to know them on their favorite stream, though the date of hatch is unpredictable. It is not always possible to match the natural insect even from a full fly box. The strict use of imitation flies is the ideal of many anglers. But because of the many difficulties and the problem of obtaining good floating materials in certain colors, anglers are generally satisfied to use a fly that at once resembles several species. This traditional practice of matching a single or similar species accounts at one stroke for the largest number of trout flies.

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No matter how flies are chosen or fished, some kind of speculative underwater view is implied. Man lives in air, trout in water, and the surface of the stream is like the borderline of metaphysics. The theory of strict imitation, asserted or hidden in simple practice, is that the trout has a fine sense of color, form, and size. The imitators uphold one or another of these capacities. Their rather formidable assumption is challenged notably by P. B. M. Alan (*Trout Heresy*), who submits "that the trout has no more brain than a lizard," and that, as say between the shades of an olive dun, it has "no powers of discernment whatsoever." To Alan the legend of the wise trout is man's conceit, "for if trout can outwit us, the lords of creation, he must be superior to us in cunning."

### FANCY FLIES

Detractors of the trout's sensibility often fish with fancy flies such as the Scarlet Ibis and Parmacheene Belle, suggestive not of species or group but merely of fly life. One can get entangled here, however. The Parmachenee Belle, for example, was created in the 1870's to imitate the fin of a brook trout; no one will ever know what the trout has been taking it for all this time. Fancy flies are fished without regard for the insects on the water. Both fancy and imitation flies take trout, yet the reconciliation of the theories behind them would be the most revolutionary event in the history of fly-fishing. It would be easier to reconcile Plato and Aristotle. Today the popular fishing writer, Ray Bergman (*Trout*), takes the genial view that any standard pattern will do. Another, Lee Wulff (*Leaping Silver*), believes that the trout sees not color so much as a silhouette, and fishes his flies accordingly. Charles M. Wetzel (*Practical Fly Fishing*), is a color imitationist. Ray Camp of the *New York Times* likes to try out new flies. The good western flytier, Dan Bailey, prefers flies for streams. Jim Deren fishes all the angles. The six are masterful fishermen and by all accounts net many fish. One ought to get a skeptical conclusion out of this. But be careful: belief inspires confidence, and confidence inspires the angler.

Basically there are but two schools of fly-fishing, imitation and

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presentation, both closed systems of thought. They work this way: The imitationist, with due allowances for skill, believes that his trout rise to the naturalness of his flies. He explains the basket of the presentationist as the result of trout mistaking the fancy or unnatural fly for some known insect. In extremity, he will deny that there is any such thing as a fancy fly; all are imitations in one way or another, and the basket would be fuller if the presentationist paid more attention to the insects. The presentationist, on the other hand, graciously attributes the basket of his adversary not to his flies but to his fishing skill. The tallest tales of fishing experience will not crack the logic of these views.

Regional fly practices defy all theory. Dry flies are predominant in the East after the snow water and April freshets have run off, but toward the West flies grow wetter and wetter. Imitation flies have prevailed for fifty years from the Beaverkill in New York to the Brodhead in Pennsylvania. They turn fancy north along the seaboard to Maine and Canada. In the whole sweep of the Rockies, flytiers are wonderfully enterprising and unorthodox. They often leave the delicacy of fur and feathers for the durability of hair, squirrel tail, and bucktail. Large, rough, and radically spectacular, their flies express the directness and enthusiasm of wild-country fishing.

## THE OLD MASTER

The main tendencies of modern American flytying largely stem from Theodore Gordon, the old master of American fly-fishing, familiar now only by his signature, the Quill Gordon fly. Gordon's influence is very much alive in the peerless school of Sullivan County (New York) flytiers, standard-bearers of the imitation fly: Reub Cross, who learned flytying from him; Roy Stenrod, author of the Hendrickson fly, and Herman Christian, both Gordon's fishing companions; the Walt Dettles, man and wife; and the Harry Darbees. (By indirection it extends to most contemporary American flytiers.) In delicacy, precision, and style, the craft of these modern masters is out of the old master, Gordon. But the knowledge of him and his meaning to contemporary fly-fishing are lost behind these opaque



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curtains of culture that obscure almost everything that happened before 1917. Gordon died in 1915 and was swept from sight like a spent spinner. He never wrote a book, and his numerous "Little Talks on Fly-Fishing" faded away in the files of *Forest and Stream* and the *Fishing Gazette*, of which he was the American correspondent from 1890. He was born in Pittsburgh in 1854 with a silver spoon in his mouth and fly-fished in the limestone creeks of Pennsylvania from the age of fourteen.

Gordon lived a remarkable life, unheard-of in our day. A man of taste and intelligence, a good, restrained, yet warm and exciting fishing writer, a reader who knew Chaucer as well as Walton and Thoreau, Thad Norris (*The American Angler's Book*) as well as Frederic Halford (*Dry-Fly Fishing in Theory and Practice*), and a devoted follower of the great Francis Francis (*A Book On Angling*), Gordon fled civilization for a retreat on that famous trout stream, the Neversink, in New York State. He put one thing only into his mind—the stream—and sustained it there unflaggingly for a great many years. An inexplicable performance, probably never duplicated by anyone anywhere. He made an elegant backwoodsman. His one fishing photograph, taken around 1895, suggests a more than ordinary discrimination in clothing and equipment. He spit blood during his last three years and died of t.b. What we really know of him is that he lived a sweet, good life, perhaps the only man ever to express with his whole life the ideal of the anglers' brotherhood. His contemporaries called him the American Walton and the Sage of the Neversink. Like everything else, fishing has been used for unworthy purposes, and the only luxury of discordance Gordon allowed himself was to snub the angling snobs.

Whatever his spiritual purpose, Gordon did not entirely succeed. His early writing is more cheerful than his last. He did not wholly escape the civilization from which he fled. The destruction of forests—bringing ice jams and floods—and pollution of streams, all killing to the trout, bothered him more and more. The increasing purchase of riparian rights and consequent closure of long stretches of streams for private use he felt was a violation of the anglers' code. And although his fame brought him many invitations, he usually turned away from

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posted and specially stocked waters with the remark that they were too easy to fish and no test of skill. He respected the clubs for their role as trout preserves. But he loved difficult fishing, and enjoyed most the days when the trout, especially the big ones whose lairs he knew, were elusive.

### A FISH STORY

Gordon is the subject of many anecdotes. His small, slender figure was beloved by the people of Sullivan County, where he and his rod were most often seen bobbing along paths and streams. His haunts were the Neversink, Beaverkill, Willowemoc—the big three of eastern trout streams—and the Esopus and Big Indian. But he had fished too in the dear Brodhead of Pennsylvania, south to Florida, north to Maine, west to Ohio and Michigan. Gordon himself tells a fishing story, incidentally revealing of his stream manners. In the early spring of 1907, when the water was too high and roily for flies in the main stream, he turned off into a tributary—a useful hint for early-season fly-fishers—and soon came upon a little Negro girl fishing a pool with stick and string. He was stalking and she did not notice him. He thought to signal her. “I did not wish to poach upon her pool, but, as a matter of form, dropped my fly at the edge of the stone and not three feet from the small maiden’s toes. It was seized at once by a half-pound native trout, which had been lurking under her pedestal, and I am not sure who was more surprised, the child or myself.”

But Gordon’s stature in American fly-fishing and trout flies is measured by more than spiritual matters. He was operating at the heart of things from 1890 onward as an inveterate fisher, writer, and professional flytier. A craftsman and an innovator, he came upon the scene at an opportune time for a great man, and he lived up to the occasion. Two disparate traditions that today make up the central course of our flytying and fly-fishing were then operating independently of each other. The first of these was the long line of English fly-fishing from the time of Berners, which was then making its greatest turn with the development of the dry fly. The other was American fly-fishing, which was then still locked in the wet fly, used mainly either in indigenous fancy patterns or in imitation patterns

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tied on British models. Gordon brought about the juncture of these traditions.

On the English side, trout flies go back to the fifteenth century. We know from Hills' ingenious and masterful history that eleven of Berners' twelve flies, the first on record, can be traced through the ages to the present time. The flies were wet and strictly imitative. Other equipment consisted of long rods and twisted hair lines. From Berners in 1496 to Cotton in 1676 (Walton was not a fly-fisher), there was practically no change except the addition of a number of flies. The seventeenth was a literary century, lit up by Walton, Cotton, Wotton, and other great fishing writers. The eighteenth century stopped writing, except such valued items as Gay's verses, and got to work supplying the tackle essentially as we have it today: short rods, reels, silk lines, and drawn-gut leaders. It was a technical century; the artistry of flytying stood still.

### ACTION UPSTREAM

The nineteenth was the fly-fisher's epoch. Literature and fishing came together in the romantic appreciation of nature. The study of science brought fly-fishers' entomologies in color, notably Ronalds' monumental work, *The Fly Fisher's Entomology*. Flytiers set to work with their models drawn in front of them and expanded their range with numerous species of insects. Pulman (*Vade Mecum of Fly-Fishing for Trout*) pulled the dry fly out of his hat, complete, in 1841, though for all anyone knew it might as well have been a rabbit. It was an extraordinary achievement, but a little ahead of its time.

Then came Stewart (*The Practical Angler*) and the first leap forward in fly-fishing history since its origin. Until Stewart, fly-fishers relied on the color and shape of flies to catch their fish. Stewart introduced *action*. How did he do this? By turning upstream, something that many western American fly-fishers have yet to do. Some fly-fishers had been upstream men since Cotton's time. But Stewart went upstream and made an argument for it. Upstream fishing is superior fishing, wet or dry, for many reasons, but essentially for one: facing

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upstream the fisher controls the position of the fly; therefore the fishing is more precise, the element of luck is greatly diminished.

### THE DRY FLY

The effect on fly-fishing was profound, for upstream fishing was a prelude to the dry fly. The dry fly must float naturally, an action almost impossible to obtain downstream. From Pulman who first held it up, to Halford who quit his business, took off his coat, and fought thirty-five years for its *exclusive* use, the dry fly had a rapid and spectacular development. During the last half of the nineteenth century it came to maturity. Color and form were debated all over again. Halford wrote the second great entomology, with color plates to identify shades of color. Thereafter the color in fly dressings could be specified by plate number. The effect was standardization, which Americans, fond of it in so many other regards, are still without. When Halford got through, a wet-fly fisher on a chalk stream in southern England "skulked like a poacher." Hills is moderate, yet here is his summation of the dry fly: "It altered both the practice and the temperament of the angler. It called different qualities into request. It has a charm and an allurements which the older sport did not possess. In what does its charm lie? Partly in the fact that all the moves in the game are visible."

The dry-fly rage was on when Halford received, in 1890, a letter from Theodore Gordon, making inquiries about this new phenomenon. Halford replied (see page 550), enclosing a paper into which he clipped a full set of his dry flies, each carefully identified in pen and ink, and the dry fly winged its way to the New World.

In the U.S. sport fishing had been practically unknown before 1830. Fish was food. The fly was not widely used, or at least not talked about, until the 1860's, when it suddenly bloomed. The Americans had learned most things from the English, who lazily "fished the rise," that is, waited until the trout showed itself and then cast over the rise. But the Americans strode their fast-water streams and went after the trout wherever they lay, rise or no rise. The fishing was good, too good, and the fancy wet fly was often sufficient to the occa-

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sion, until the 1870's when the native brook trout of the East were suddenly fished out.

The great American fisher of the century was "Uncle" Thad Norris, experienced in books and native practice. He knew about everything there was to know in his time, put it all down in 1864, and thereby established the school of early American fly-fishing with a rounded theory and practice. Like Stewart, from whom he must have learned it, he was fishing upstream, sometimes even drying his wet fly in an effort to make it float. That was the nearest that an American came to getting in on dry-fly development—a gesture.

By 1879 the brook trout were all but gone and the hardier brown trout not yet transplanted from Europe. The editor of *Forest and Stream* threw in the sponge with a long editorial dirge, ending, "This is probably the last generation of trout fishers." Norris' crowd had got all the trout, and the next generation and succeeding ones had to learn conservation. Eastern fishing, the larger part of early American fishing, grew in difficulty for more reasons than one. The immigrant brown trout was wiser than the native brook. Neither fancy flies nor wet flies were enough. Fly-fishers of the nineties faced upstream and waited for something to happen.

## THE MODERN FLY

It was a historic moment, then, in 1890, when Gordon opened Halford's letter and fingered his flies. Gordon was as American as a brook trout. His first practical book had been Norris'. From it he had learned to tie his first flies. Like Norris and his predecessor, Stewart, he was an upstream man. He had fished through the decline of the brook trout and the rise of the brown, and so cherished the native species that he flatly refused to accede to its scientific designation, charr. It was a *trout*. He had seen sights unseen by the modern angler, "water covered with dimples made by the rising trout as far as my view extended."

The significant thing is that Gordon had fished the wet fly dry, the natural outcome of an acute upstream man fishing over rising trout. Instinctively he dried the fly, as Norris had done. But the con-

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struction of the fly was wrong. At best the wet fly when dry keels over like a victim of DDT and floats inert on the surface. Gordon was a reader of English as well as American books. It was natural, logical, and inevitable that a man of his temper, consecrated to angling, should have heard the echoes of Halford's crusading din across the water.

Gordon saved Halford's fly donation as models of construction for the tying of his own flies. His job had just begun. First, Halford's flies imitated English insects, different from ours. Gordon set out to correct this in his own way. Lacking any kind of formal fly-fisher's entomology, he studied what entomological knowledge there was, and began to observe duns *on the water*. It is thus owing in part to the lack of American color-printed entomologies that he observed flies under natural conditions and, tying their imitations impressionistically on the spot, gave rise to our contemporary style of American flies—the cockiest, and among the prettiest, most natural flies in the world.

He became for a time a strict imitationist—that is, he tried for an impression of individual species. Although he grew so well acquainted with insects in his long sojourn by the stream that he could carry the impression of hundreds of them in his memory, he gradually turned moderate, the effect in part of becoming a professional flytier. He came to grant that under all but the most difficult circumstances an imitation covering a group of species was sufficient for good fishing. Many of his species flies are now used as group types. He never went against the fancy fly in theory, recommending it for wild waters. Flies according to the conditions, he said. His own preference, however, was for tough conditions. After all, when you have fished intensively for a half-century you may be excused for preferring it tough.

A further Gordon contribution grew out of the fast stream: the English, fishing the rise in quiet water, can afford to use a softer hackle than Americans, whose flies are always being ducked by white-caps, froth, converging currents, and all the movements of the stream. Gordon sought a stiffer hackle, a matter of greater selectivity in cock necks, and tied it as sparsely as the conditions would allow. From this the fly developed greater delicacy and buoyancy. The key to the

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American dry fly today is still buoyancy, and, assuming you start with a light wire hook, that means hackle. American flytiers now introduce stiff hackle into their flies, even at the cost of departing in color from strict imitation of natural insects.\*

Other men made contributions to American fly-fishing after 1890. Since Gordon never put his work between covers, the laurel for the first book on the dry fly went to Emlyn M. Gill (*Practical Dry-Fly Fishing*) who hatched out the dry-fly cult in 1912. Here, as in England, the cult put on a great, if belated, campaign to sink the wet fly forever. Its titular leader was Gill's friend, George La Branche, whose book, *The Dry Fly in Fast Water*, is regarded by many as the American classic on the subject.† One of the all-time greats of American fly-fishing, La Branche made a unique contribution to the technique of fast-water fishing: the decoy method of floating a fly many times over the supposed lair of a trout for no less a purpose than to create an *entire artificial hatch*. His celebrated fly is the Pink Lady. Yet Gordon, who fished the dry fly from 1890, tied it, talked it, and wrote about it, never joined the cult or turned away from the art of the wet fly fished upstream. When the dry-fly rage came on, he resisted it. In England the "wet" man Skues (*Minor Tactics of the Chalk Stream*) had fought the "dry" man Halford, and the two made a balance. Gordon's range was wider. He performed the joint services of a Halford and a Skues.

In brief, then, the classic American trout fly of today comes down to us in the English line from Berners through Cotton (Walton's

\* The crux of the materials problem, to this day apparently without hope of solution, is certain feathers. Dry flies fished in fast water must float on tiny, stiff strands of feather hackle, obtained from rooster necks. But poultry raisers usually kill roosters before they reach two years, the age at which some of them might develop prized neck feathers, and flytiers generally cannot afford the cost of raising poultry exclusively for feathers. Rarest of necks is the blue dun; flytiers have made reputations on their blue-dun hackles.

† E. R. Hewitt (*Better Trout Streams*) and others have added much to the knowledge of stream life and equipment. Charles Goodspeed (*Angling in America*) has done a tremendous job of spading up our pre-Gordon fishing history. J. A. Knight's *Salunar Tables* are interesting. Harold Smedley (*Fly Patterns*) has recently done a fascinating study of trout-fly origins. Louis Rhead (*American Trout-Stream Insects*) made a heroic but misguided effort to build fly-fishers' entomology without a sound system of classification. P. J. Jennings (*A Book of Trout Flies*) has done a good but sparse comparative entomology. Paul Needham (*Trout Streams*) has done a broad scientific black-and-white job on stream life. Charles Wetzel's *Practical Fly Fishing* is excellent on the relation of artificials to naturals, lacking only color.

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disciple) to Stewart, to Halford, to Gordon; and in the American line from Berners through Cotton to Stewart, to Norris, to Gordon. It continues down to us from Gordon through the creations of contemporary flytiers, some of whom have been mentioned here.

Whatever your preference in trout flies, take Gordon's advice and "cast your fly with confidence."

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Gordon wrote casually from year to year, often in more than one place on the same subject; and though he possessed a library of the books of his favorite fishing writers, he neglected to keep a file of his own published writings. As a result his work contained many repetitions. I have eliminated most of these, leaving some where I could not extricate the repeated item from a new thought. But the heaviest editing was in sloughing off what did not seem to me to be of general interest. I am quite sure that my error was on the conservative side and that much of this book is of particular interest to persons who in matters of fishing are not unlike myself. In any event, I believe that nothing of general interest has escaped.

I have divided Gordon's work into two parts, published pieces and letters. In the first I have assembled the items from the *Fishing Gazette* and *Forest and Stream* and placed them together in chronological order. In the second I have separated the letters into three parts, according to the person to whom they were sent. Each group then is arranged chronologically. I believe the *Fishing Gazette* pieces are the more sophisticated of the published works, perhaps because Gordon was counting on the most exacting audience of fishing critics ever gathered around one paper. The *Forest and Stream* pieces are particularly for the general reader. The Jenkins letters, written to a young enthusiast, should be popular. The Skues letters will be understandably unreadable to the uninitiated. They are in effect professional. The more personal letters to Roy Steenrod are intended here for Gordon-maniacs.

Gordon's lengthy correspondence with Frederic M. Halford, the great English publicist of the dry fly, has apparently been lost. A single letter from Halford to Gordon, written in 1890, which had as an enclosure a set of Halford's dry flies (reproduced in color in the



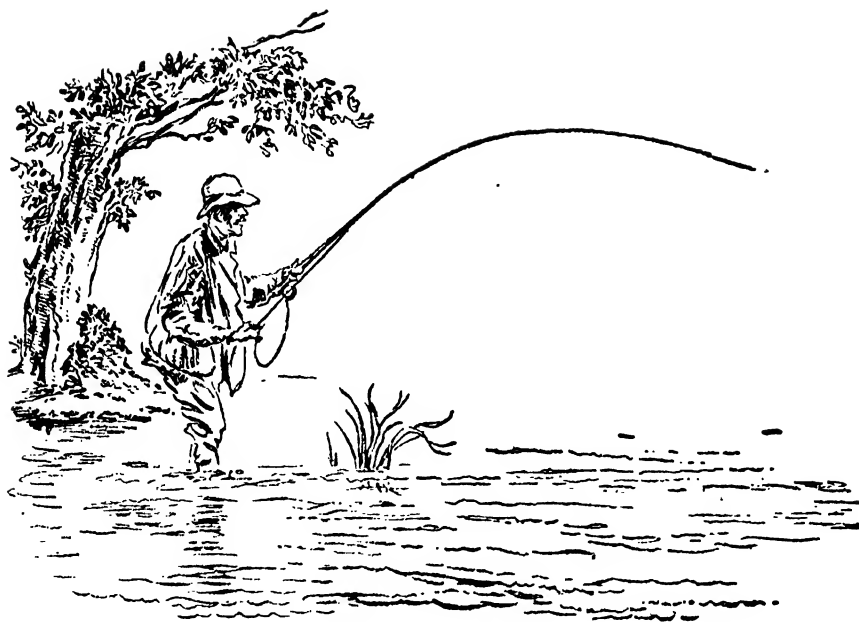
## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

May, 1946 issue of *Fortune*), I have included for its historic value in setting the date of the introduction of the dry fly in the United States. R. L. Marston, the present editor of the *Fishing Gazette*, has kindly searched for letters from Gordon to his father, R. B. Marston, with no success. Fortunately, however, many of these letters were printed in the *Gazette* as American correspondence, and they appear here in that category. Extensive correspondence with several American anglers seems to have been lost. Gordon was a prodigious letter writer and if someone had gotten around to this job earlier there would have been more to collect. As it is, there is a lot and it pretty well covers the ground.

A very few items by other writers are included: the debating worm fisherman (page 325), the debating Nova Scotian (page 323), and occasional notes chiefly by R. B. Marston of the *Fishing Gazette*. All footnotes and comments marked "Ed." are mine. Except when otherwise indicated by name or initial, the rest are Gordon's.

Only in two important instances is Gordon outdated, namely, in the present trend away from his long, heavy rods and the abolition of the use of many bird feathers in flies. Fly-tying readers will find pleasant surprises in fly dressings to be found here in detail sufficient for copying. Unless the habits of trout have changed more than is likely in the past thirty years, flies by Gordon should still be a good dish. Gordon's discussion of his Quill Gordon as a pivotal fly subject to different dressings (page 441) should have a considerable effect on its future use. This famous, standard fly apparently was not meant, as so often thought, to represent a single insect. "I can vary them to suit," he says. The historically minded may be startled to find him discussing dry flies for salmon in 1903. These references are merely to suggest that much lies ahead.

For centuries prologues have been essential to fishing books. Since Gordon did not write a book, he did not write a prologue. I have therefore gone so far as to write one for him.



## PROLOGUE

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IF YOU HAVE sat beside a pool in the mountains, held still by the white spray, the fluttering mayflies, the sounds of water on rock, your eyes moving in dream down the flowing water and coming back up in the eddy foam, looking through air into the everlasting mystery of that other medium of life, your senses tense with expectation—then you know. But if you have not, then come sit down and listen to all the fly-fishers that ever were.

You will notice that everything is left behind for the play of wing and fish in the theatre of nature. You will enter alone with rod, line, leader, and, at the end, the fly, seemingly detached from you, and join in the play. The rod is light, yet strong and flexible, not over ten feet, not less than seven. The reel is at the very end of the butt, out of the way. It stores the line, which you may hold in your hand, though you will often play a fish from the reel. The line tapers to a fine end,

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

giving weight behind, lightness ahead, for the cast. The leader then further tapers to a threadlike tip, its length, from seven to fifteen feet, to suit your style and the conditions. Its color you hope will be unseen in the water, for you wish to disguise its connection with the counterfeit fur-and-feather fly hook that you attach to its tip. The fly may simulate the dainty mayfly duns and spinners you see gently winging their way over the water, or, in the late evening, the buzzing caddis flies staggering aimlessly around. You insinuate your fly delicately into this universe, well known to the trout who hunts there, fishing it under the water if it is a wet fly, or on the surface if it is a dry.

But you must keep well away. You grasp the rod with one hand, draw the line from the reel with the other, switch the rod rhythmically in the air, sending the line looping high ahead and behind you. You are "false casting" and watching. You have seen a trout rise, or believe you know where one may lie. Your fly is a dry one this time, and so you are facing upstream. You study the currents of water moving at different speeds and gauge the amount of slack to lay across them. Your line is well out now and you let it go, intuitively aiming it a couple of feet off the water at the point above the trout's lie where you wish the fly to alight. When the line has gone well forward, you shoot the few feet of it still held in your hand, check it slightly, and, if all is well, your fly flutters down and cocks up on the water where you wished it. The slack line discounts the differential in the water movements, and the fly comes naturally along its own current and floats over Speckles. Your heart pauses. A rise. You come back with your rod gently and firmly. The hook is set. The play is on. Speckles gives a good show, showering red-gold into the air. He lunges, cruises, tugs, saws against rocks, sprays up again toward the sky, makes for cover, retires into his lair. You keep your rod up, let its resilience take the strain from the light wire hook and flimsy leader. Give line. Do not pull hard against the stream. This is a particularly good trout. A little time passes before he comes tired over your net. Then you will surely agree with the first fly-fishing writer, Dame Juliana Berners,\* that the trout is "a ryght deyntous fyssh and also a ryght

\* Berners, Dame Juliana. *The Boke of St. Albans*. Part IV: "A treatyse of fysshynge wyth an angle." Westminster, Wynkyn de Worde, 1496—and other editions.

## PROLOGUE

fervente byter." You may keep him if you like, killing him quickly, or you may let him go with a pat on his tail.

Afterward, you will not have anything to repent, a remarkable fact noticed by Berners in 1496. Wordsworth called it "the blameless sport," and Lord Grey, Viscount of Fallodon, sustained the poet in his astute *Fly Fishing* in 1899. (He came to angling from politics.) Man lives by work, in art gives order to complications, in play finds sensation absolute. Fishing is play that brings out the good in man. Its merry spirit induces relaxation and leads to a fair age and a long one. In its pursuit, life will course through your veins as freely as the stream. In its solitude, you will meet yourself with more or less pleasure, and, as many have written, you may commune with the angels.

Thoreau alone has opposed the fisherman with an argument worth reflection: that fishing and other sports are youthful concerns that distract one from the full embrace of nature. Thoreau was misguided here, perhaps by a hasty fisherman or two. The stream is the avenue of the forest and the artery of nature, and the fly-fisher has yet to complete its exploration. Distraction indeed for those who feel as capacious as Thoreau. And if one angles for the pleasures of youth? If only one could rise them!

Fishing is a sport of the young and old, more intriguing on the last day than on the first. In his last days, Lord Grey, half blind, fished by touch, living out his own observation on the fly-fisher's development: first, the born angler's desire for success and its excitement; then, the willingness to take the pains and trouble necessary to acquire skill; and, at last, "a certain delight in fishing water well, which for a time at any rate is independent of results."

This is the substance of the traditional prologue to fishing literature. Fishing outranks all other sports for these reasons. Doubters should read those twin source books of the sport, Berners' treatise and Walton's dialogue, and go fishing.

JOHN McDONALD.





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THE  
COMPLETE  
FLY  
FISHERMAN









## P A R T I

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### *THE NOTES of* *THEODORE GORDON*

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FISHERMEN COMMONLY AVOID formality in their writing. The following pieces, arranged chronologically as in a diary, are given the modest title of "notes" for the reason that Gordon himself declined to give them any greater pretension. He sometimes called them "Little Talks." Gordon was first published in the *Fishing Gazette* in 1890. He began writing in *Forest and Stream* thirteen years later. The early items in the *Gazette* apparently were culled from letters to that journal's distinguished editor, R. B. Marston, who was afterward pleased to take deserved credit for discovering Gordon. Later Gordon became the regular American correspondent. Long before he was recognized in the U. S. he was respected by one of the greatest generations of British fly-fishers. At first sight, Gordon's admiration for

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

British fly-fishing may make him appear strongly prejudiced in their favor. It has been said that Gordon went to England to fish, but there is no evidence that he ever fished outside the U. S. He learned British fly-fishing in the minutest detail from books and letters. Yet no one did more than he to eradicate the copying of English flies and fishing methods on American streams. Gordon's comparative criticism of the sport in the two countries enabled him to develop the modern American style of fly-tying and fly-fishing out of the great English tradition.—Ed.

### AN AMERICAN LAMENT

F. G. I HAD GOOD fishing last summer. The stream was  
MARCH 7, 1891 a fine large one, but hardly suited to "dry-fly." I did something in that line in the large pools, but not much. It is astonishing how strongly marked are the peculiar characteristics of streams and trout in this country. The difference in most killing flies in streams in same district is hard to understand, except in dark- and white-water streams. We have no entomology of trout waters in America—worse luck. The differences between American and English naturals are great, yet I believe I am safe in saying that the majority of flies used are tied after English patterns, more or less ancient.

I was astonished to find that in New York a large proportion of the flies sold are imported, and this in the face of a duty that would appear to be prohibitive. Good fly-tiers must be abundant, and willing to work cheap for large dealers. The Scotch flies were in the first rank, and sold as "best flies," and certainly the work and material were excellent. Many of the cheap flies are tied in Germany, from patterns sent out there. The best American-tied flies are generally the best for our waters, but they don't seem to make many even at a higher price and no duty to pay. It is of no consequence to me, as I tie my own, but few anglers in this country pay much attention to the naturals, and in Maine waters generally, I believe, it is perfectly useless to do so. The case is different, however, on many streams in the middle States.—Savannah, Ga.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

### DRY-FLY FISHING IN AMERICA BEFORE 1865

F. G.  
FEBRUARY 27,  
1892

HAVE YOU EVER read Thaddeus Norris's "American Anglers' Book," 1865? It was my book of books for many years. It mentions dry-fly fishing—on page 333—as follows: "If it could be accomplished, the great desideratum would be to keep the line wet and the flies dry. I have seen anglers succeed so well in their efforts to do this by the means just mentioned, and by whipping the moisture from their flies, that the stretcher and dropper would fall so lightly and remain so long on the surface that a fish would rise and deliberately take the fly before it sank. One instance of this kind is fresh in my memory. It occurred at a pool beneath the fall of a dam in the Williwnock [probably Willowemoc—Ed.], at a low stage of water, none running over. The fish were shy and refused every fly I offered them, when my friend put in a Grannom for a stretcher, and a minute Jenny Spinner for a dropper. His leader was of the finest gut and his flies fresh, and by cracking the moisture from them between each throw, he would lay them so lightly on the glassy surface, that a brace of trout would take them at almost every cast, and before they sank, or were drawn away. He had but these flies and made his whip for his evening cast in this pool, &c."

This was probably written several years prior to date of publication. I have fished the Williwnock. It is in Sullivan County, N. Y.

### RAINBOWS AND LANDLOCKED SALMON

F. G.  
DECEMBER 15,  
1900

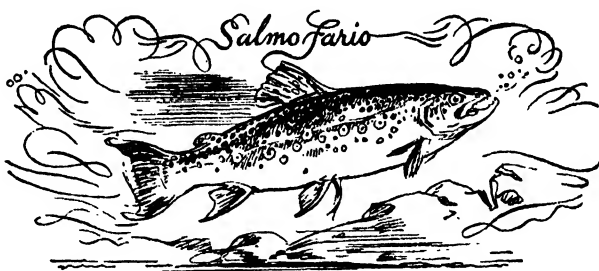
SOME YEARS AGO I picked up a first edition of "The Fly Fisher's Text-Book," 1841, by Theophilus Smith, and knowing that you are interested in such books, beg to forward it to you by this mail.

I have been a wanderer since the spring of 1897, but during a recent visit to Haverstraw I found that the *Fishing Gazette* had been posted there up to within a year. This is principally my fault. For a time I sent the necessary money to have the paper forwarded to me at various addresses, but finally forgot it. This oversight I will make

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

good as soon as I get into business again. I have been in the enjoyment of poor health for several years, in spite of the fact that I have spent my summers on farms near trout streams.

I wish you could see how successful the introduction of *Salmo fario* (brown trout) has been in this country. It is rapidly increasing



in America, and in many waters grows to a large size. I have taken them up to 3 lb. with the fly, and specimens have been caught up to 8 lb. or 9 lb. They can endure a higher temperature than *fontinalis* (brook trout) and seem to displace him. The rainbow (*irideus*) does well in large waters and can stand even warmer water than *fario*. The rainbow is a great fish, playing like a salmon, and having much the appearance of that fish. They usually lie in heavy, deep, swift water, and after taking the fly, throw themselves in the air about three times, and then rush downstream. They can stop in the midst of the heaviest rapid, and you can imagine what it is when wading deep to have to stumble out to where you can follow them down.

I don't understand what I read about the conduct of *fontinalis* in England. You think their habits are those of the lake char. This is a great mistake. They want cold, pure water; but their natural home is in brooks and streams, and it is only when you reach northern waters that you find them in large lakes. Their habits are the habits of brook trout, and to the fly-fisher they are no more char than *fario* is. The so-called landlocked salmon has been a great success in Maine, and is now taken frequently up to 12 lb. or 15 lb., with an occasional much larger fish. This year they rose well to a fly with peacock body and brown mottled wing. The weather was too warm in September,

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

however, and all over the eastern country fish life suffered from a long drought.

[I was glad to get the above letter from an American correspondent (Mr. Theodore Gordon) the other day, especially as I had not heard from him for some years.

[That the *fontinalis* is a good river fish in America I have not the least doubt, but in this country, as far as our rivers are concerned, he is a failure. And what about the rainbow? Millions have been set free in our rivers all over the country, but if there is any instance of their having been thoroughly established and breeding satisfactorily I should be very glad to hear of it. "John Bickerdyke" told me the other evening at the Fly Fishers' Club that he believed they had done well in the Mimram and the Dove. Where they can be prevented from going downstream they seem to grow well, and perforce have to stay. I caught a few brace of beauties in the Hertfordshire Lea and Rib last season; in the Lea they were large fish put in out of a rearing pond, and confined by gratings; but a heavy flood will give them liberty, I fear. On the Rib they had come down from the higher reaches. The rainbow is a splendid fish, and I should much like to see him become a naturalised English subject. In ponds and sheets of water fed by springs or a stream they do well, if there is plenty of food. That, weight for weight, they give better sport than *Salmo fario* is not my experience; perhaps they jump and splash about more, but in hard under-water fighting our trout more than hold their own. The rainbow tries to get off by a series of sharp runs and jumps without much method, while his English cousin keeps his head, and seems to say to himself, "If I can get under those roots or into that weed bed I shall beat him yet."—R. B. MARSTON.]



# THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

## NATURAL FLIES AND DRY-FLY FISHING

F. G.  
JANUARY 19,  
1901

I MADE A STUDY of several flies last season. The American grannom is interesting. It hatches out in June (at least, in streams of 1500 ft. elevation), and lasts ten days or two weeks. On hot days the rise begins after the sun is off the water, and the number of insects is astonishing. They seem to rise and fly upstream, shape identical with their English cousins, but the fly is larger and much darker in colour. I had considerable difficulty in producing a good imitation, but in the end was very successful. It is a curious fact that in one stream only, as far as I can ascertain, a large fly hatches out in the month of May, which is called the mayfly there, but belongs to the stonefly genus (we have the genuine stonefly on many of our waters). It is large and fat, light in colour, and comes out at times in swarms. The natives



say that it passes through three stages in transformation, but I only saw it in the perfect state dropping its eggs in the water. It is a clumsy insect, and frequently gets caught in this act by the rapid-flowing water, and is carried down several yards before it can rise again. Strange to say, the trout do not seem to care for it at this time, although earlier they are said to rise freely to it.

We have two flies which are more or less like the English March brown: one, a pale chocolate colour, rises in limestone streams at a low elevation in late March or early April; the other, smaller, with brown body and narrow golden rings, rises in mountain streams usually in May. It is quite dark at first, but grows lighter with warmer weather. It is a beautiful insect, and its transformation is a beautiful golden shimmer with sparkling gauzy wings, and, if I remember rightly, quite prominent eyes of a bluish shade.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

Most of the spring duns are much larger than yours, and display at least as great a range of colour. Dry-fly fishing is gaining ground every year, but some men persist in using two flies. I have heard a great deal of the success of one gentleman who is said always to fish dry, and nearly always with a Coachman as dropper. I should like very much to see him at work. I usually fish dry with a small dun, and one fly is all I can cock properly. At times it is a great waste of time to fish dry, especially early in the season.

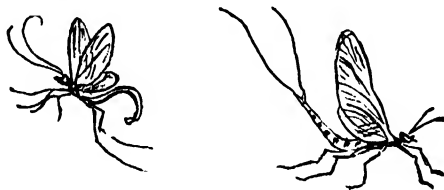
### A NOTE ON FLIES AND FISHING FROM AMERICA

F. G. I FOUND a good many of my old back numbers of the *Fishing Gazette* recently, and have re-read JULY 26, 1902 many of the articles with renewed interest.

The *Fishing Gazette* is a great educator, and it is safe to say that we owe much of our knowledge of new methods of fly dressing and of improved patterns to its pages. I am under great obligations to Mr. F. M. Halford, who about twelve years ago sent me forty-eight of his best patterns of dry flies. We have an extraordinary variety of natural flies on the streams in this state without going farther. Many of the Ephemera are as large as and larger than the English mayfly, and there are innumerable caddis, stoneflies, etc. There are several grannoms, it is said, but I only know one species well—a very dark purplish dun fly, a little larger than your insect. It is very abundant in June at an elevation of about 1200 to 1500 feet (mountain streams).

A good many dry flies are imported, but are usually tied on larger hooks than those used by chalk-stream fishers in the old country.

It is not at all advisable usually to fish with hooks smaller than No. 1 or 2, and flies on hooks as large as No. 4 or 5 will frequently kill well when fished dry in our larger brooks.





## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

I have collected duns of many shades one-half to three-fourths of an inch in length.

We have great difficulty in getting hackles of the proper colours to dress duns, but our resources in the feathers of various birds and furs of many animals have never been thoroughly studied. Several times I have been on the point of sending you a quantity of stuff with a view to having it tested in the imitation of your may and other flies, but I know that you are a very busy man.

I once sent a small package to "Val Conson" [G. E. M. Skues], withholding my name. An enthusiast on any subject justly lives in fear of making a nuisance of himself when mounted on one of his hobbies.

Only last week one of your experts would have had a fine time on the river I was fishing. The fish rose very shyly to the wet fly, but a floating fly met their views at once, though the colour of the natural fly on the water was very peculiar—a sort of fleshy dull yellow below with speckled fleshy legs. I desisted from fishing, and walked to the nearest country store to buy a small bottle of oil, and then returned to the big pool I had been fishing only to discover that the little box of eyed dry flies was not in my pocket. We had taken train at four a.m.; I was stupid and sleepy, and the dry flies so carefully prepared had been left in my bureau. I managed to score pretty well with the smaller fish, but I am sure that a floating fly of the right colour would have secured some of the big fellows.

It is strange to me that worm fishing is so popular. The endless talk about "clear-water worm" in the English papers! For instance: Henderson, in "My Life as an Angler," speaks of worm fishing as a new discovery—something quite wonderful in fact. I have no doubt that Adam fished with a worm after his expulsion from Paradise. I do not deny the skill required. I used to fish it myself; but there are many game fish which may legitimately be taken with bait. While the fly-taking fish are few in number, worm fishing kills many small fish which if taken with fly could be returned uninjured. It spoils the sport of many to give full baskets to a few. On a small brook you will have a poor time of it fishing after a wormer, while half an hour or so will make your chances nearly or quite as good as those of a fly-fisher preceding you.—West Haverstraw, New York.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

[The flies Mr. Gordon sends would kill on any trout river. What he calls the "American Grannom" would be taken for a big Iron Blue, and the "Golden Brown Spinner" is like a small May Fly—summer duck wing, badger hackle, and golden body. Mr. Gordon says his friends find it kills so well they call it "The Gordon."]

I do not think Mr. Henderson referred to worm fishing generally but to clear-water worm fishing, and he did not invent that either, as Charles Cotton describes it.—R. B. MARSTON.]



### SOME NOTES AND QUERIES FROM AN AMERICAN CORRESPONDENT

F. G.  
SEPTEMBER 6,  
1902

I DO NOT KNOW how far you have been favoured in England this season in the matter of weather, but we are having a remarkable summer on this side of the water, wonderfully satisfactory from the trout-fisher's point of view.

Since June 1 much rain has fallen, the trout streams have been maintained at spring levels, and some very good fishing has been had. I am referring more particularly to the Atlantic seaboard.

We have quite a variety of trout in eastern waters now—speckled brook trout, the western rainbow trout, and your European trout (*Salmo fario*). The last-named has displaced the native fish to a great extent in many of our streams. They grow faster, as they are probably heavier feeders. I knew of one in a small tank that displayed the greatest rapacity and greediness. It was evident that this fish objected to the other trout getting any minnows at all, as it would try to prevent their having them even after it was stuffed to repletion. This fish, I was told, gained two inches in length in less than six months—that is, from fourteen to sixteen inches.

The black bass feed very little, or not at all, during the cold weather. I believe that they hibernate in very deep water. As the tem-

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

perature of the water rises they take more and more food, consuming an enormous quantity during the summer. A water temperature that would put trout off the feed entirely seems only to give the bass an appetite.

I have heard much of the destructiveness of the red fox, and of the quantity of game it consumes, but a friend, who kills many every winter, tells me that he rarely finds anything in their stomachs except field mice.

The number of quail this season is very remarkable. The dry summers and mild winters of recent years have been very favourable to this bird, which in this country takes the place of the English partridge, having many of the habits of that bird.

The long drought in 1900 was very injurious to the trout; small brooks dried up entirely, and large streams were reduced to mere threads. This year, we hope, will make up for all the losses we then suffered. The water was cooler early in July than at one time in May, and we have had better fishing in July and August than for many years.

For some time we have noticed a tendency to reduce the size of flies used in lake fishing for large trout, and this season it is pronounced. Two years ago a friend wrote me that he had had good sport on the Rangeley lakes, in Maine, using flies on No. 8 hooks, and now we read reports of the largest salmon and trout being taken on No. 10 and No. 12 hooks (old style).

We do not think that such large flies were ever used in Scotland in lake fishing as were at one time popular over here. We used No. 3 in 1885, and Mr. Henry P. Wells, in his well-known work "Fly Rods and Fly Tackle," recommended No. 2 for big trout.

We will probably go to the other extreme now. Nothing but midges will do. We will have to take record fish on three-ounce rods and infinitesimal or imperceptible flies if we wish to be honoured. It is certainly an exploit worthy of emulation to take large fish with the finest tackle and smallest flies, but there is reason in all things. We know of nothing more absurd than a fine large man being played by a fish in a big, bold, rocky trout stream. Lake fishing is different, but even then *unnecessarily* fine tackle should be eschewed.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

Some of the rods now in use would be more comfortable to fish with if they weighed more on the scales. The handles, reel-fittings, etc., are made very light, but everyone knows that it is the weight out-bound, the leverage, that tires the hand and wrist in a long day's fishing. I believe that a ten-foot split bamboo (split cane) should weigh six ounces or a trifle more, and a nine-foot rod at least five ounces.

For two years past I have been using quite fine lines for fly fishing, though at one time nothing would do but a very heavy taper. It may be that heavy lines are necessary for dry-fly fishing in England with the powerful rods in use, but the best American rods are now made with plenty of backbone. I see some very light rods that are quite stiff, and the tendency is to use short rods.

Some men use agate or jewelled tips, and if one is in the habit of shooting his line this is an excellent plan. Unless steel rings and tips are put on the rod this constant shooting of the line soon wears deep grooves, which chafe and wear it out, besides reducing the length of the cast.

Your brown trout in this country is not quite so shy and wary as the native brook trout (*fontinalis*). I may be mistaken, but such is my belief. In fishing a pool where there were but few brown and many brook, I have found the first most easily taken. Possibly, as they grow faster, they may require more food. Both are splendid game fish, but as far as sport goes I think the rainbow trout superior to either.

Many men, many minds. The variety of opinions I have heard expressed in regard to these three fish has been really very remarkable. For some time there was a strong prejudice against brown, and as for rainbow his portrait has been painted in the blackest colours. It may be that the brook is the best table fish. I do not think so, but so many people say that it is superior that I doubt a little, particularly as I do not care to eat trout. Large brown trout should certainly be boiled,



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

and, so cooked, seemed to me a fair substitute for salmon. Rainbow trout are white fleshed, and are usually considered inferior, yet Mr. Fred Mather and other competent judges considered them an excellent table fish.

I can be very happy in pursuit of any species of trout, and have had the good fortune to basket the three mentioned out of the same stream on several occasions. The habits of all are quite similar, the rainbow preferring heavier water usually, where it is deep, rapid, rushing.

### THE RAINBOW TROUT IN AMERICA AND A NOTE ON RODS

F. G.  
DECEMBER 6,  
1902

IT IS UNFORTUNATE that the rainbow trout has not done well in your waters, as a better game fish does not exist. From the reports in the *Fishing Gazette* it seems that in almost every instance where they have been used in stocking streams they have disappeared, but they have done well in ponds, reservoirs, etc.

In this country similar results have followed the introduction of this fish into *small* streams, but in a large, bold stream, such as you would probably call a river, they have been abundant for over ten years. I fear that they are now yielding a little to the brown trout, which have been stocked in considerable numbers.

One curious fact is that the rainbows ascend the tributary brooks in any push of water late in the season, August for instance. They rise freely at the artificial fly as long as the natural flies abound, until late in June; after that date the water is usually warm, flies very scarce,



## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

and the fish can only be taken with grasshoppers, or with minnows, at night.

The rainbow leaps again and again, and always runs down stream. Brown and brook trout almost invariably run up, at least their first run is *up*; but the rainbow, after throwing itself into the air, tears desperately down, and you must follow if the fish is of any size. Men not accustomed to this trout are apt to lose all the large fish they hook for some time. It fights to the last, and when landed has scarcely a kick left in it. A big brown trout will sometimes, if the water is warm, make no run at all, but will sulkily allow himself to be towed about until he is about to be landed, then make a flummix like a pickerel. The rainbow is always game, as far as my experience goes, and is more like a salmon than any other trout.

I have not read all the letters in *re* "Light *versus* Heavy Rods," but suspect that they will be followed by a craze for extremely light rods on your side of the ocean. About ten years ago I imported an English rod by the most celebrated maker, and have used it cruelly in much heavy fishing. The handle is very long, and it has a rubber button and spear. The *tapered* ferrule with lock joint struck me as funny. For a long time it rattled and had a slight tendency to turn. The rod was about 10 ft. 3 in. in length, in two joints, and was rather inconvenient in travelling. The weight is about 10 oz. All things considered, it was a fine, durable weapon, up to any amount of work, and almost unbreakable. A 20 lb. salmon would not be too much for it if backed by sufficient line. It is a thoroughly well-made, serviceable article. I have never found it very fatiguing to fish with, although I am not a strong man. It lacks, perhaps, the sharp, quick action of many American rods. The best, most delightful rod I ever saw was an old Leonard, weighing 6½ oz. Casting with that rod was a poem, a delightful pleasure, and I have handled 5 oz. rods that seemed heavier. By cutting down the handle and trimmings the weight on the scales can be reduced, but it is the weight outboard, from the hand, that is tiresome and produces that paralysis of the grasping hand. That is the only place where any punishment is felt, if one is using a really good, well-proportioned rod, which does practically all the work. A friend of mine who for twenty years had fished right through every season

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

from the first day to the last, had a heavy handle into which all his rods fitted. The joints he used for stream fishing were very light and made a grand 9 ft. rod; yet the heavy handle carried the weight up to something like 8 oz. This rod felt like a feather in the hand. We must use our common sense in this matter, and I believe that 5 oz. is light enough for a servicable rod. Many of the 4½ oz. rods are perfect, but I prefer a longer rod myself, and basing my ideas on the old rod previously mentioned, would choose one of 6 oz. to 6½ oz., 10 ft. in length. I am not muscular, and like the rod to do the work. Another thing, I have gone back on heavy lines—that is, lines of great diameter. *Fine*, solid lines are to be had, which work sweetly, and with which it is easy to cast lightly and well. I was all for the heavy line a few years ago, but for our fishing over here, where dry-fly fishing is the exception and not the rule, the fine line is very satisfactory.—West Haverstraw, New York.

P.S.—We all have our little pickadillies, as Mrs. Malaprop said.

## AMERICAN NOTES

F. G.  
JANUARY 24,  
1903

THE LIFE HISTORY of the frog and toad in the *Fishing Gazette* for August 16, 1902, reminded me of a curious incident which I witnessed recently. A large green frog of the edible variety hibernated last winter under the boards and straw which had been used to fill in a fountain. When the covering was removed, early in the spring, the frog appeared to be almost lifeless, but when the water was turned on it quickly recovered. Several large goldfish, weighing nearly 2 lb. each, were turned into the fountain, and no food was supplied, yet frog and fish remained healthy, and seemed to grow. About the middle of August half a dozen small frogs were brought in by two boys and dumped into the fountain from a bucket. All dived and swam some distance, and one unlucky specimen came up within a short distance of the big frog aforesaid, which was sitting on the stone rim. The latter immediately sprang into the fountain, and seizing the youngster in his mouth scrambled out again. There he sat for several minutes, a portion of the small frog, including two legs, sticking out of one side

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

of his mouth. These legs waved frantically, and after a time the cannibal tried to sweep them into his mouth with his forelegs, making gulps and trying to swallow this hearty meal at once. The eyes of the big frog seemed to project a great deal, and shone like yellow diamonds. After several rests and many gulps the small frog at last disappeared, and was stowed away in the vast stomach of his relation. It probably weighed about one-quarter as much as the big frog, but the latter was able to jump and swim as usual, not suffering any inconvenience from its gluttony.

The katydid began her song last year about August 8, and the ancient belief is that in six weeks from the time when her assertive remarks are heard the first frost of autumn will visit the land. I do not think you have this insect in England. It resembles a large grasshopper, with very long legs, but is more delicately formed; the colour is a very pretty light green. The male is said to say *Katy didn't*, and the female answers *Katy did*, and this dispute continues all the night. Poor Mr. *Katy didn't*!



Some men have great good fortune. Last spring several large rainbow trout were seen jumping below the falls of the Esopus, in Ulster Co., N. Y. Precipitous walls of rock rise on both sides of the deep pool below these falls, the formation resembling a western cañon, and as no boat was available it seemed impossible to reach the fish. A mill is perched upon the cliff above the pool, and the miller conceived a brilliant plan of action. He baited a good-sized hook with a large helgramite and lowered it from the window of his mill down, down into the foam and spray far below. He struck a fish at once, and actually succeeded in hauling or reeling it up into the room in which he stood. It proved to be a fine specimen of the rainbow trout (*Salmo irideus*), eighteen inches long. I have not visited these falls for two



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

years, but think the distance between the water and the window must have been about fifty feet. Lucky miller!

This has been an unusual season everywhere; much rain has fallen, and the streams have been filled with pure cold water from source to mouth. What a welcome change from the many dry summers of the past decade. I had begun to think that summer trout fishing, at least in July and August, in the larger streams was a thing of the past. Nothing is so discouraging when beginning a day's fly fishing as to find that the water is warm. With high water late in August the big trout recover their appetites, and leave the deep holes to which they retire during the hot weather.

A few are killed every season, but these large fish seem to bear a charmed life. They are very wary, and remain year after year in the same pool, defeating all the attempts made to capture them.

They are hooked occasionally when lying in the rapid or broken water at the head of the pools. Now and then they will take a fly near the pool foot, when they have remained there after the night hunt for minnows.

Fly-making is a fascinating amusement, and we wish that it was not so difficult to obtain first-class materials for artificial flies. No one can turn out a perfect fly with indifferent hackles and feathers.

In reading of the fishing in English waters, nothing astonishes us so much as the great variety of fish found in one river and in the same locality. Some of these rivers would be called large creeks (or "criks") in America. Since they flow, as we presume they do, in populous districts, often near great cities, the reports of fish taken are really wonderful.

We hear occasionally of fly-fishing for pike, and would do so more frequently if greater care and thought had been given to the construction of the flies used for these fish. The peacock eyes and glass beads which are supposed to resemble a dragon fly are not the thing at all. Dragon flies are all right, but we do not believe that they are particularly tempting to pike. Some years ago we tried some flies on an entirely different principle, our notion being to turn out something that would have great life and movement and resemble a small bright fish in colouring. If you could see one of these large flies played,

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

salmon-fly fashion, by a series of short jerks of the rod top, and notice how the long fibres expand and contract, how the jungle fowl feathers (in a line with the hook) open and shut, you would see at once that it must be very attractive to any large game fish. White and silver predominate, but are toned down by long badger hackles and jungle fowl feathers. The tail is made of two scarlet ibis feathers back to back.

We have taken, with a companion, sixty pike in an afternoon with these flies. Usually the big fish prefer the fly well sunk, but it is more sport when the fish can be seen when they rise. I will send the formula to anyone with enough faith in his composition to try them, as I have purposely left out that part of the fly which of all the materials most contributes to its life-like effect. They will kill all kinds of game fish, salmon included. (Evidently the Bumblepuppy fly. See page 42 for complete dressing.—Ed.)



### WERE THE TROUT KILLED BY LIGHTNING?

F. G.  
FEBRUARY 21,  
1903

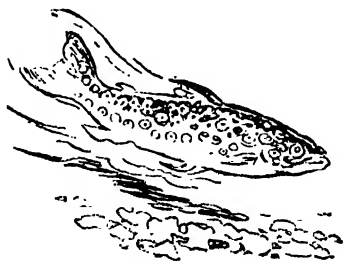
THE NOTE of the editor in the issue of Jan. 17, "Were the Trout Killed by Lightning?" reminds me of an incident that may answer the query, in part at least. Some years ago I was a member of a yacht club which had pleasant quarters on our southern coast. These included a club-house and long dock extending out into the salt water. As no good fresh water was to be found, a driven well was put down about 300 feet to a bed of blue clay. A fine stream of pure clear water immediately gushed forth, which was quite palatable, only slightly impregnated with sulphur. As the supply was large the pipe was tapped close to the ground, and a fountain made near the club-house. The centre ornament of this was a large gilt metal stork or crane, and thereby

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

or thereto hangs the tale. The manager of the club was an old sea captain, fond of fishing from the end of the dock. Sometimes he caught a striped bass or sheepshead, and instead of eating the catch he immediately popped them into the fountain. These were purely salt-water fish, but nevertheless they took kindly to the change of habitat, and as the captain fed them frequently on oysters, crabs, shrimps, and small fish, they grew rapidly.

Two of the striped bass were always shown with great pride to all visitors to the club. These fish weighed about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  lb. each when placed in the fountain, but in two years gained about 4 lb., and were really handsome specimens weighing  $6\frac{1}{2}$  lb. each. All the fish were very tame, coming up to be fed. One day a violent storm arose, and the air was heavily charged with electricity. A blinding flash in the club-house was followed by a deafening peal of thunder, and it was felt at once that the building had been struck. It was ascertained afterwards that the bolt had landed on the extreme end of the house and followed a metal conduit some distance. From this it had leaped to the metal stork in the centre of the fountain, and the two big fish were floating belly upwards. None of the others were affected, though several weighed from 2 lb. to 3 lb. The large striped bass lived for nearly twenty-four hours, but could not regain their equilibrium, and a *post-mortem* examination proved that the air sacs of both fish were burst.

These are absolute facts—the transference of salt-water fish to fresh water that had just come from a depth of 300 feet, the success of the experiment, and the loss of the big fish by lightning. In a year or two equally large striped bass were to be seen in the fountain.



## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

### JOTTINGS OF A FLY-FISHER—I

F. S.  
MARCH 14,  
1903

WITH THE MONTH of June, good sport on most of our Eastern trout streams may be said to end. The hot days of early July usually send the fish to their summer retreats, and no matter how numerous they have been, few can now be found, except a school here and there at the mouths of cold brooks, or where springs pour their freshening waters into the main stream.

On the whole, the season of 1902 may be said to have been a fairly satisfactory one, in spite of heavy floods and ice jams during the winter. Trout were quite abundant in all the old nearby brooks and rivers, and took the fly well until late in May, when symptoms of hook shyness began to appear, with great discrimination in the color of the artificial fly. One pattern would be taken and the other left. On our last fishing excursion we found the fish quite hard to please, and great perseverance and many changes of fly were necessary before a fair basket could be made.

Anglers are too apt to pin their faith to two or three favorite flies, and to imagine that if the trout should not rise at these, they will not take at all. In many of the New York and Pennsylvania waters this is a great mistake, particularly on those streams that produce a great variety of natural flies. Some one particular color is apt to be the favorite for a time, and I honestly believe that even when the trout are taking almost anything, larger fish and a better average will reward the man who takes the trouble of looking out for the natural fly, and, if possible, imitating it in color and size.

This question has been pretty well thrashed out, and men whose experience has been chiefly confined to wild waters in Maine and Canada or the regions of the Great Lakes will be apt to scout such ideas, as well as many other good anglers of experience. However, the proof of the pudding is the eating of it and chewing the string. I have been fixed in my faith by many experiences, but I grant you that entomology is only necessary, or particularly successful, in some localities; in others, it is a waste of time to study the natural fly, though to me it is always interesting. One thing is clear: if you grant that a

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

fair copy of the living fly is the best that can be put up in a certain stream with which you are familiar, you at once have something to go by; you are no longer fishing at random, but have a definite end in view. At the risk of being tedious, I will give a few of the many experiences which have led me to study entomology, as far as my opportunities have permitted.

Many years ago I was fishing a fine large limestone stream near Bellefont, Pa., in company with a native of that town, who was a most expert angler and who cast in a particularly graceful manner. The scene of our afternoon's sport was a rather shallow mill dam constructed only a few years before; this dam was full of brook trout of about a quarter of a pound each, and they were rising steadily all over the water. We cast and cast, and compared the flies in our respective books. Finally, in an old envelope in the pocket of his book, my friend found a small straw-colored fly closely approximating the fly at which the trout were rising. He put it on, and in half an hour or a little over caught 42 trout. He had only one fly of the kind, so I was forced to play audience, nothing that I could offer being tempting to the fish.

During the same week I had much the same experience with a very dark, almost black fly, which I think belonged to the crane fly genus. I was fishing with three flies on my leader, and the middle fly happened to be nearest the natural. It had a very thin body of silk, and fishing quite a short line over a deep channel under sheltering willows, I could see the trout rise and take this fly between the two others. After some hours the fly was literally chewed up, and I substituted another, which I thought very nearly the same. The body was a little lighter and was made of mohair instead of silk. It proved to be entirely useless, and I was forced to put on the mangled remains of the old fly, when I again began to kill fish.

Again, on a hot morning, after a five-mile tramp, we were re-



## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

freshed by a charming, cool breeze springing up from the southeast. My companion on this occasion was a veteran angler of large experience and a most agreeable man to fish with. The month was July, and as we reached the stream we noticed many of the little blue duns with long tails rising from the surface of the pools and floating easily up stream before the breeze. I had a dozen flies on No. 12 hooks, which, as far as body was concerned, were the right color, and my friend had two of the same which he had copied from mine the day before. I put up two flies of the same kind, and he one of them as a tail fly. We soon began to take fish, but my companion was so unfortunate as to lose his tail fly in a trout. For some reason he wished to keep his remaining fly as a sample, and being a little ahead of me put on a small Coachman until I should come up. When I did so he borrowed a couple of the bluish-bodied flies. Meanwhile, however, the small trout had been taking his Coachman freely, and being partial to the use of this fly, he did not care to change it, but persisted in its use. We kept quite close together, as the stream was large, and again and again he said, "Was not that a pretty big fish you caught?" Several times he saw the fish when landed and said, "Well, I have seen no fish like that to-day." We ate our lunch sitting on a log far up the stream.

Returning, he fished first, I giving him fifteen minutes' start. I caught up with him at a large pool just as he was wading out. It seemed useless to fish at once after him, but I waded in and made a cast, when at once two large fish rose at the flies. I hooked one, and after a good fight my friend netted him for me. "Well!" he said, "what fly are you using? I have seen no such fish today, but time is up; we must start for home." "Wait a minute," I said. "There is another fish here." I waded in again, and at the first cast hooked the trout, which, after a good struggle, managed to free itself from the hook and escaped. On the way home we stopped at a cold brook to rest and turned out our fish to wash them. We found that my friend had 36 trout and I had 34, but that mine weighed double, owing to the larger size of the fish. This case was peculiarly clear, as we fished together nearly all the day, and my chum was in several respects the more skillful fisherman; his casting was fine, and he had a very neat

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

and expeditious way of netting his fish after playing them up to him.

The weather has everything to do with the time at which natural flies appear; there may be a difference of from one to three weeks in different seasons. A few varieties do not appear annually in numbers. I have one fly in mind that appeared abundantly in August, 1890; only a few specimens have been seen since then. I could find a few at almost any hour on a cool day, and a great many in the morning or after four o'clock in the afternoon. The body was peculiar, a yellow with a tinge of olive or green. After several failures a lady gave me a quantity of scraps of crewel, and picking one of these to pieces, I spun it on light yellow silk. This gave the exact color, and adding pale dun wings and a ginger hackle, I had a good imitation of the natural fly, which proved very killing for about three weeks. It did not matter where this fly was placed on the leader, all the best fish were taken with it, and on several occasions I was successful when other anglers had poor sport. This fly has not been of much service, except for a short time in 1898.

There is a little orange-bodied dun that hatches out on cold days in July, which is a great favorite with the trout. It seems to come up when a strong wind is blowing and clouds obscure the sun. A very small dark cowdung is well taken while this fly is on the water; the hook must not be larger than No. 12. A small blue dun is an excellent fly at times all through the season, but it is difficult to get hackles of the right color for legs. Hens can be found at long intervals which give the right color, but their hackles are very soft. If you cannot do better use the lightest brown or ginger hackle you can get. We have a beautiful large fly, which may resemble the English mayfly, but it is a very light yellow. If you make the body of silk it is apt to be too dark when wet. I prefer wool or crewel, though the former soaks up much water.

If you can get the old-fashioned crewel, made, I have been told, from the fine hair of some kind of goat, it will be found very useful. It is the same color, wet or dry, and has been dyed a fast color. Chenille, if made of silk, is good for making large flies and for Uncle Rube's favorite fly, the Ruben Wood. The muskrat, mink, weasel, field mouse, rabbit and many other animals afford an excellent fur.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

No one but a fly-maker can realize the difficulty in getting hackles fit for trout flies. Not one cock in twenty is worth examining. Many years ago this was not so much the case; more game fowls were bred and the birds found in a farmyard were smaller, rounder and more like game birds in appearance. The introduction of large coarse fowls has not only injured the flytier, but has given us a poor bird for the table, coarse fleshed and stringy, with a prominent breast bone, very unlike the partridge-like form of the old-time chicken.

Fifteen years ago, in many of our best New York trout streams, a one-pound native trout was a big fish. In all my experiences of waters easily accessible from New York, I took but one fish of sixteen inches. Since the introduction of the brown trout, all this is changed. The average size of trout taken has much increased, and many fish of two pounds are caught every season with fly. Not only is this the case, but not a year passes that a number of immense fish are not (at least) hooked by fly fishermen. I mean fish weighing from four to six pounds. These usually escape, owing to the light tackle used, but they afford a man a sensation that he is in no danger of forgetting to the last day of his life.

### JOTTINGS OF A FLY-FISHER—II

F. S.  
MARCH 28,  
1903

THE SEASON of 1900 was a particularly good one, and the average size of the fish taken was really remarkable. However, the long drought of that year, lasting from June until late in the fall, was very disastrous, many of the tributary brooks dried up entirely, and great numbers of small fish were destroyed. In the large streams the big fish had a hard time of it. The extreme low water laid bare their retreats and they were poached in every conceivable manner, shot, snared, speared, etc.

The year 1901 began well; we had much rain and the spring was a late one. The fishing was not as good as the previous season, but better than was expected. The hot week early in July put a stop to fishing, but for a short time great numbers of fish collected at the mouths of cold brooks. In several cases I heard that advantage of this was taken to destroy the large fish by dynamiting or otherwise. I know



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

of one or two convictions, but the penalty imposed was not in proportion to the offense committed. For instance, the fine was \$50 in one instance, when hundreds of fish were killed and served to summer boarders.

I am an admirer of the rainbow trout, one of the most difficult fish to land I know of. Rainbows like to lie in streamy water several feet in depth, and if there are heavy rapids below you are pretty sure to have to follow one of any size to the end of them. I am sure that this fish would be a great success in the lower waters of our large trout streams, such as the Beavercill, Neversink, etc., as it can thrive in much warmer water than any other trout. It is a great favorite in Germany, and has been successfully introduced into some of the rivers in New Zealand. In the former country it is considered commercially, but in the latter is spoken of as exhibiting all the sport-giving qualities I have mentioned, rising at the fly, leaping from the water, etc. Six pounds is a weight often reached, while in Germany specimens of over thirteen pounds are recorded.

In this country I have read of one being taken in a lake (I think in British Columbia) weighing twenty-three and a half pounds. A gentleman in Denver, Col., holds the record there, with a rainbow of twelve and one-quarter pounds, taken with artificial fly. The fishing in rivers in that State has been greatly injured by the newer methods of refining ore, the refuse from the cyanide process killing the fish. With modern fishculture there is no reason why we should not have good sport in all our old well-known streams, frequent restocking with fry, or if possible yearlings, making up for any drain upon them, at least by fair fishing. If a stream is heavily fished a fair proportion of the trout will soon become sufficiently educated to save them from



## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

the wiles of most anglers, enough to leave many breeding fish after the season for angling is past. I fear, however, that in a few years very little water will be free to the public.

More farms are "posted" every year, and miles of the best waters are leased from the owners, or a strip of land on both banks is purchased by clubs or individuals, sometimes for a trifling sum in cash. It is claimed that waters stocked by the State cannot be closed, but this probably has no more foundation than the statement made years ago that the public could not be excluded from any flowing water that had been used for logging. I for one would feel like a poacher if fishing posted water without a permit. Personally I care little for fishing strictly preserved water, or for fishing anywhere where trout are so numerous and easily taken that they are undervalued.

In 1885 Tim Pond, in Maine, was so crowded with small trout of one-fourth to three-fourths of a pound that anyone could take them, and my anticipated pleasure was almost annihilated on arriving by finding that the camp keeper had been obliged to bury 75 pounds that morning. To take large fish when they are shy is the acme of sport. A day now and then on preserved waters crowded with fish eager for your flies is a pleasant novelty, but for real sport give us free water where the trout are critical, hard to please, and highly valued when caught. Fish are not necessarily scarce in such a stream; they may be numerous and even large, but have learned through much temptation to take good care of their precious skins.

I know of one preserve that is managed on very generous principles. Bait-fishing is strictly prohibited, but any fly-fisherman asking permission for a day on the water is never refused. The fishing has greatly improved since this club controlled the water, though few fish have been turned in. The stoppage of bait-fishing in the space of a year or two increased the number and raised the average size of the fish. Small trout will take a worm all day long, and nearly every day, and few recover after having a good-sized bait hook in their throats. Bait-fishing for trout may be made a scientific and enjoyable amusement, but we have only a few fish that will rise to the artificial fly, while there are many good game fish for which bait-fishing is the only practical and satisfactory method. I know of several most expert bait-

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

fishers who have made this sacrifice for the benefit of the brotherhood of anglers at large. One of these gentlemen is really a marvel. He can cast a long line with wonderful accuracy, never breaking his worm, and dropping it like a feather almost in the exact spot he wishes. The sacrifice in his case is really very great, but has been persevered in for several years.

The enormous increase in the number of anglers in recent years has made it necessary that all true sportsmen should consider the interests of others as well as their own. On a good-sized stream one may fish after several fly-fishers without much diminution of sport. I have waited half an hour after nine had passed and then had a very fair day. One or two worm fishers can spoil the sport of many, and this is so generally recognized that in fishing with bait-fishing friends they have invariably asked me to precede them, saying that they lost nothing by following me, but that I would fish after them.

I wish that attention could be attracted to the introduction of the European grayling into some of our streams. They are said to drop down into the lower portion of trout streams, and as rainbow trout do the same, we might have fine fishing from, say, the first of August until very cold weather, where now there is nothing except wind fish and suckers. Grayling and rainbows are both spring spawners, and are in highest condition in the fall of the year. My impression is that only the large rainbow trout spawn, as I have never seen any signs of it in the month of May except in fish over a pound in weight. Fish of fifteen inches and over were often thin, and the vent was conspicuous, while those of smaller size were in first rate condition, plump and hard, and as silvery as possible. The mouth of the rainbow would seem to indicate that it is not a cannibal, but a large female in the New York Aquarium was very savage. She injured her companion, and when I saw her had been placed in the tank with the salmon. She was of a restless, shrewish disposition, evidently.

It has always annoyed me to hear our beautiful native brook trout spoken of as a char. In olden times this fish was known to scientists as "*Salmo fontinalis*"—"The salmon of the fountain"; a most appropriate name, it would seem, for a fish inhabiting only the coldest and purest streams in the country. It was then put in a sub-genus and

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

given a new name—*Salvelinus*—because, I am told, it has the same teeth on the vomer as the European char. The habits of the latter fish are utterly and entirely different; they live only in very deep lakes and are rarely taken except in nets when they seek shallow water to deposit their spawn. A few are sometimes taken by sinking a bright fly and moving it very slowly. I know nothing of the fish except from brief mention in books read years ago, but I believe I state the case correctly when I assert that the European char have few habits in common with our speckled trout, and that it is slanderous to call him a char. Even in Lake Superior and the Maine lakes our brook trout only seek the depths when the surface water is overheated in the months of July and August.



Of late I have been giving more attention to the feathers of our game birds, as I do not believe that American flytiers have made the most of their resources in furs and feathers. Men who have the habit of observation have frequently called my attention to the similarity in the coloring of certain birds and insects. It has been called mimicry in nature, and it may be of great service in imitating some of the flies which form the favorite food of the trout. An insect diet has proved to be the most nourishing, and quickly brings the fish into condition. I have read somewhere that the experiment was tried of feeding the trout in three small pools at a fish hatchery with flies, larvæ, maggots, etc., and with worms and minnows. Thomas Tod Stoddard was the authority for this experiment, I believe. The trout fed on the first developed much more rapidly than the other two. Minnows came next and worms last. It is said that worms scour the trout, having a laxative effect, but I know nothing about fishculture except through a few visits to hatcheries years ago when methods were comparatively primitive.

Flies without wings are often very killing, and some that I have tried with a soft feather twisted in front of the cock's hackle have

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

done good work. I got the idea first from a fly that was sent to me from England. The stems of these soft feathers are often very stiff and hard to manage, but the long fibres are not particularly objectionable, as in practice the flies hook just as well as those dressed with small cock's hackles. They are not pretty, but give an impression of life in the water. If anglers generally would take a little more interest in the construction of their flies, they could assist the flytier materially by making practical suggestions that would lead to decided improvements in many of the flies in use.

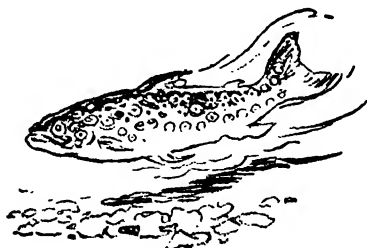
The common practice of naming flies after persons has become something like a nuisance. The fly lists are growing, growing, and much unnecessary duplication of colors is the result. A list of lake and sea trout flies came to me recently in which the names indicate the materials of which the flies are made and the colors in the body. "Mallard and yellow," "Mallard and green," "Mallard and gold," etc. This may answer pretty well for fancy flies, and if we ever have a good natural history of the flies born of the water, the difficulty might be obviated. Imitations of the flies described would probably have to be tied in more than one shade of color—say, light and dark yellow duns, and so on—and the fancy flies could be named after the materials composing them. These are only tentative suggestions, and are probably without practical value. Lists will continue to expand, as few anglers are indifferent to the compliment of having a killing fly named for them.

Anglers are patient, hopeful people. All the fatigues and misfortunes of the pursuit are forgotten, or form subjects for jokes or amusing reminiscences. We remember our first trout and nearly all of our big fish until the last day of our lives. The man who caught his first trout with a fly may be congratulated. I took mine with a worm scented with asafœtida. The old man who introduced me to Bonny Brook was a real old-time fish hawk, such as may be found in many fishing neighborhoods. He believed devoutly that the ill-smelling stuff referred to had a powerful attraction for all fish, and kept his worms stored in an old stocking with a big lump of this drug, or whatever it is, in the middle. The foot of a sock held the worms for a day's fishing, with a smaller quantity of asafœtida in that. Poor old Docky: he passed to the land of ever-flowing waters many years ago.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

When a friend goes fishing I always send after him a wish, not that he may fill his basket, but that he may take a really big fish, and this, thanks to the liberality of the State of New York, is not a very improbable event. Trout have been taken with the artificial fly within a short distance of New York City weighing five pounds or more, and we know that in many of our large streams, and even in some that are quite small, larger fish are known to dwell. Two years ago, in August, when the river was very low, I saw a male trout in the Beaverkill that I am confident was 28 to 30 inches in length. As I got within ten feet of this fish on two occasions there is no reason to doubt that I judged correctly. This fish inhabited a hole in what was usually a large pool, and had his home under a flat rock only just large enough to conceal him. He went under diagonally and had some difficulty in getting his latter end tucked away out of sight. His coloring was very bright for a big fish, the head very large, with great powerful jaws, and to see him open them a little, as he did once or twice, made thrills run down my back. That fish is right there now, as such fish haunt the same pool for many years, and I will describe the place to any good fly-fisher.

Another large fish was in plain sight from the public road on almost any day you looked for him. Some people put the weight of this trout at seven pounds, but I believe this estimate to be excessive. It was truly a brown trout—in fact, almost black—and a large company of other trout—natives, browns and a few rainbows—was collected in the same pool to enjoy the water flowing in from an ice-cold brook. When the water fell very low these fish would be literally plastered against the stones, as most of the cool water flowed under the rocks and gravel into the main stream.



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

### JOTTINGS OF A FLY-FISHER—III

F. S.  
APRIL 4, 1903      I HAD ONE great day in June, 1901, and the sport was especially welcome, coming after a disappointment. Starting after midday, I reached the stream I was about to fish late in the afternoon with rain falling in torrents. I put on my waders during a lull, and found the water not only very high, but so much discolored that fishing was out of the question, at least with any prospect of success. There was no train to return that evening, or I would certainly have gone home. The rain ceased early in the evening, but I went disconsolately to bed and dropped off to sleep with the roar of the swollen stream sounding in my ears. The next day was Saturday, and when I went to breakfast, I was told that the water had cleared considerably. I soon found this to be the case; it was clear enough for fly, though still very high. The sky was overcast and it remained cloudy all day, constantly threatening rain; in fact, I believe that a few drops did fall from time to time.

Under these circumstances I was not long in getting under way. For some time I could do nothing. I could not reach the casts I knew, so as to fish them properly. At last I was encouraged by capturing a small trout of about a quarter of a pound. Proceeding downward I came to a place where the stream was greatly expanded over a wide rocky bed. Far out in the middle, near several large stones under water, was a kind of pool of fairly deep water, yet with a heavy current through it, while directly below was a large and dangerous rapid. We knew the place above the rapid of old as the haunt of large trout. With great difficulty I succeeded in wading out far enough to fish this place properly, by casting a long line, although the water was within an inch or so of the tops of my stockings. I was fishing with only one fly, a kind of nondescript, tied by myself, with a light yellow body of wool on a No. 10 hook. At about the third cast, when the line was well extended and the fly over the lower end of the hole or depression, and just where the water probably began to shallow a trifle, I detected a very modest rise. I struck, and instantly an immense fish leaped from the water. The leap was diagonally across, not directly away from me, and really the trout appeared a perfect monster in this position,

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

the curve of its broad back and wide spotted side, with the splendid propeller, a tail that to my excited eyes appeared as big as a palm-leaf fan, the fish cleared the water by many inches, and a desperate rush for liberty followed. I thought just then that I could not move (I changed my mind afterward), and had only thirty yards of line on my reel. Before I could curb this charge, only three or four turns were left me on the spool (you must remember that I had hooked the fish at the end of a long cast); in fact, I don't think that I really stopped the trout at all; he turned of his own will when he struck shallow water. I put on all the pull I dared, under which the fish gradually dropped back into the deepest part of the pool. I had recovered many yards of line when suddenly the trout rose toward the surface, a great swirl appeared, and then my reel screamed again. Before I could say Jack Robinson or even John, the fish had rushed down the stream and was in the heavy swift water at the head of the rapid. Nothing could stop him then; any attempt to butt him would have torn out the small hook, or caused a break in my fine cast. The line was quickly exhausted and I followed in water which for some yards was up to my waist. No thought of getting my wading stockings full then. The coarse rocks were cruel and the footing exceedingly bad, but I stumbled on, my legs like towers of lead. I was about winded when the fish took it into his head to stop in the rapid, probably behind some stone, but it appeared to be right in the middle of the rushing current. The check was but momentary, but it enabled me to get opposite the fish, and as he checked his wild career once more before reaching the shallows at the bottom, I managed better and felt that I had my good fellow in hand. I think that we were both pretty well played out by this time, and after many short rushes I stranded the fish where there was so little water that he fell over on his side. On getting him in hand I was greatly disappointed to find that instead of a five-pounder he was two pounds less.

Had this fish been lost, say, in running the rapid, he would have been remembered as that four- or five-pound trout that got away. Nevertheless, he was a noble trout and made a great fight.

The water was cold and the fish very active that day. It is not the rule for brown trout to leap, but many of those caught did so more



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than once. I took a two-pound trout that did not, but most of the fish were of large size. The basket consisted of twenty-four trout; twenty of these I carried home next day, and they nearly filled the big creel, capable of containing twenty pounds of fish. This was a wonderful day's sport; in some respects the best of my life.

The large stream, high cold water, unusual average size and activity of the fish, combined with the depression and disappointment of the day before, all seemed to enhance the sport and make of this a record day indeed. In a petty brook such fishing is not possible, as even if you take a large fish he has not room to show his powers and is apt to sulk. The heavy water and peculiar place in which the largest fish was hooked made the sport rather like salmon fishing in miniature.

We forget most of the disagreeable or unpleasant incidents attending our sport, but we never forget the big fish we have lost. When a boy of thirteen years I saved all my pocket money for a considerable period to purchase a fly rod; it was too good a rod for a boy without experience and was soon broken. I remember the sad affair very well, as a large fish played an important part in the event.

At the end of a thicket on Bonny Brook (this, by the way, was a favorite breeding place for a single pair of woodcock) was quite a deep pool, with hollow grassy banks, forming a fine retreat for trout. A common snake fence divided the thicket from a meadow, and by standing on one of the lower rails I could cast my worm in the pool. I did so on this occasion and the swift current carried the bait under the hollow bank; I was not conscious of a bite, but on trying to withdraw the line found it was held fast. Forgetting my delicate tackle, a vigorous pull was given, the rod bent double and a large trout was drawn to the surface. Becoming wildly excited, I endeavored to haul the fish out on the narrow margin between the fence and the pool; the trout was actually drawn half out of the water; when the rod broke in two places, the trout disappeared and before I could gain control of the line, freed himself from the hook. I could have lifted up my voice and wept; my feelings can hardly be realized. My legs were weak, and a sensation of utter goneness and woe possessed me. To break my beautiful new rod was a frightful misfortune, but to lose that trout was calamity indeed. I had never seen such a trout; it was

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

at least twelve inches long and may have weighed three-quarters of a pound. The big friend who accompanied me soon came up; he was older than I, and for some years I could not forgive him his efforts to make a joke of my loss, and to tease me about it. In my excited grief I had foolishly appealed to him for sympathy: The wocs of childhood and youth are not always shortlived.

Trout were numerous in all cold brooks in those days, but even in the large streams a pound specimen was a large fish. I remember seeing but one two-pound trout during my boyhood; this seems rather remarkable, as I was familiar with some of the big limestone streams in Pennsylvania. They were deep and rich in food for trout; a peculiar moss which was common in them was filled with larvæ, snails, shrimps, etc. Many flies appeared on the water and the evening rise of trout was something to be remembered. Very little fishing was done after the early part of the season, which began then on "All Fools' Day."

According to my recollection the trout were in good condition, and on one opening day I made a basket of 38 good fish during a snowstorm; the temperature could not have been low, as the snow melted as fast as it fell.

Glancing over a book called "Sixty-three Years' Angling" recently reminded me of a fine old salmon fisher, now gone to his rest, as the views of the author and my friend agreed and in some respects were uncommon. They believed that the salmon takes the fly in anger, because he is tantalized and annoyed by it. The author of the work goes so far as to say that the pattern of fly used for salmon is not of the slightest consequence. "Why the salmon takes the fly" has been the subject of much discussion and argument for many years, and all that we can do is to form our own opinions from such reliable evidence as we have before us. After learning from books how to tie trout flies, I became ambitious and devoted much of my leisure to the more complicated insects, or rather lures, used for salmon.

It is very difficult to obtain the requisite materials in this country, but those necessary to tie a few of the standard patterns were imported, and after working for three hours on a single Jock-Scot, I succeeded in turning out quite a pretty fly. In an account of the

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fishing season in the river Eden, in North Britain, a new fly was mentioned as having proved very killing that year, one salmon of 49½ pounds and another of 43 pounds having been taken with it. The formula of the fly was given and I copied it. It proved to be a very harmonious creation of blue and silver, orange and black, golden pheasant toppings, etc., and I gave one or two to each of my salmon-fishing friends. One of these gentlemen was on the Restigouche in June of that year fishing the club waters on the invitation of a friend.

On a bright, hot day many rods were at work, but the fish were not inclined to rise, and none were taken until one of the guides, an Indian, I think, in looking over my friend's stock of flies, noticed the Eden fly I had given him. He attached it to the leader and casting over the same water five large salmon were risen and hooked. The best fish weighed thirty-eight pounds. Were those salmon made angry by the Eden fly and not by the Jock-Scots, silver-doctors, Durham-rangers, black-doses and other flies presented to them? My friend was the only one among many who had any sport on that day. By the way, the form of the Pennell hook, a plain tapered shank with gut loop (not an eyed hook), was disliked by all the guides at that time. The hook was rather slender, and Mr. Pennell has since brought out a much heavier hook, with a returned eye for salmon flies.

It is unfortunate that so few fishermen keep a record of their sport, with the attending circumstances, as much interesting and often valuable information is lost forever. Experience is the great teacher, and if that of many could be brought together, we would know far more than we do of many things bearing upon our art. The man who keeps everything he learns locked up in his own breast will know far less than he who compares notes with his fellows. My reason for writing these random notes and recollections is that they may remind other men of their interesting experiences, and perhaps induce them to write also.

There are a great many amateur flytiers in this country, but they have no medium of communication. In the course of years many new materials are discovered, and if one is a fair observer one picks up a little practical information about entomology.

I am surprised that more ladies do not take an interest in fly-

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

fishing. It is well within their powers, and those accustomed to exercise soon become enthusiastic. Eight years ago a young lady was my fishing companion quite frequently, and although we had to tramp four or five miles to reach the best part of the river, she never became too tired to enjoy the sport. She wore a Tam O'Shanter, sweater, short jacket and skirts, with stout shoes and leggings, and waded, as I did, without waterproofs, which are only a nuisance in warm weather. The constant exercise prevents one from taking cold, care being taken not to lie about long enough at lunch time to become chilled, though there is little chance of that when the summer sun is high in the heavens.

This girl soon learned to cast a fly quite well, in spite of the fact that her rod was a poor one (a split bamboo nine feet in length and weighing four and a half ounces is just the thing for a lady). She saw portions of a most beautiful trout stream never before visited by a woman, and had many interesting experiences. An involuntary bath was the only misfortune she experienced, and she did not suffer from that. No one man or woman who has once taken an interest in fly-fishing ever becomes indifferent to it. A fresh source of pleasure in life has been gained and one that will continue to afford enjoyment until the end of the longest life.

The inhabitants of New York and vicinity are greatly favored in their opportunities for sport. Good salt-water fishing is near at hand and owing to the excellent facilities for travel a man can leave the city by the Newspaper train at four o'clock on any spring morning, spend a long day on good water a hundred miles away, and return in time for a late supper the same night. Of course, it is better and more agreeable to spend a night in the country, but it is not really necessary.

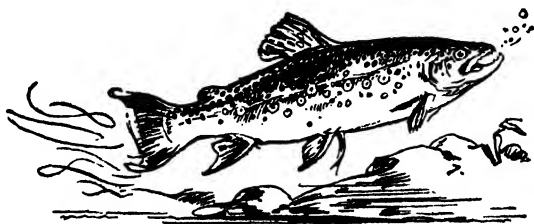
Business is so absorbing that many ardent fishermen can only steal a day now and then, in the early part of the season while fishing is at its best. The clubs on Long Island are largely patronized, but are beyond the means of the majority. Also a desire is felt to visit wild unpreserved waters, to get among the mountains and the evergreens. The angling fever is a very real disease, and can only be cured by the application of cold water and fresh, untainted air. I know a man eighty years of age who used to visit the Restigouche every year as

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

soon as the ice was out. He often descended from his car at Matapedia to find himself in a snow bank, but his ardor was never chilled. On one trip he traveled many hundred miles, spent one day in a wet boat, caught one 25-pound salmon and a bad attack of influenza and was shipped home in spite of himself. He was quite as eager the next spring.

I am one of those who believe that all the vagaries of trout that seem so incomprehensible are capable of a rational explanation. For one thing, the eyesight of round-eyed creatures is not as good as that of almond-eyed human beings in some respects, although better in others. They are deficient in the sense of form, keen to detect motion and shades of color. A deer will not notice you if you are absolutely still, but the slightest motion sends him off at once. Trout are the same, only more so, if anything. A shadow alarms them greatly, and the position of the sun has much to do with our success, or the lack of it. If the rays of light are reflected from the water in a certain way, you can stand within easy casting distance of a school of shy trout in even the shallowest water; they cannot see you, nor can you see them. Prove this the next time you have an opportunity.

Trout take a fly when it is all chewed up sometimes. It does not look like anything to us, but to them it may be the exact color of a fly that is or has been hatching out, and they take it as larvæ or nymph just emerging from its case. I have, when not able to make a really good imitation of a fly upon which the trout were feeding, contented myself with a body of the right color and a few turns of almost any feathers of the right shade. This will kill better than a well-formed fly of the wrong color, though greater accuracy is desirable.



# THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

## AMERICAN NOTES

F. G. IN DEFINING the difference between wet and dry fly, Mr. F. M. Halford, on page 36 of "Dry Fly Fishing APRIL 4, 1903 in Theory and Practice," states "that the dry fly is nymph state, on the surface of the stream, while the sunk (wet?) fly an imitation of a winged insect, either emerging or emerged from the is an imitation of the larva or nymph moving in the water, or of a winged insect when water-logged or drowned." It is to the last phrase that I wish to draw attention, as I think it embodies a popular error, which is accepted as fact, not only by the dry-fly purist, but by many wet-fly fishermen.

A well-dressed fly just under the surface has the appearance of a perfect insect, *on the surface*, to the trout whose education has not been carried to a comparatively high point by persecution. A fly that is wet when out of the water is a dragged, messy-looking object, but place it in the water, and immediately all the fibres are ordered right, and it looks just as well as when dry.

A wet-fly man frequently casts over rising fish, with a well-dressed copy of the natural fly on the water, just as he would with a dry fly, and catches trout, too, practically for the same reasons that would give him success with the dry fly.

I have been tempted to say my little say in this matter because I think there is a misapprehension of facts among many people. Over here more and more dry-fly fishing is done every year, at least in the middle States, on hard fished streams, and I note that it is the most skilful of the wet-fly men who take to dry fly and are most successful.

Fortunately for us we are not obliged to use such small flies as are usually necessary in your chalk streams. No. 00 or 000 hooks would be a great handicap on a big rough stream where the trout could perhaps by a short run reach a long heavy rapid. I do not believe that trout inhabiting gently flowing rivers have the power or dash possessed by fish whose home is in a brawling rocky stream; at least, when the water is cold. When the temperature rises in July and August the trout lose much of their activity. I have fished some of the big limestone streams of Pennsylvania, in which are many mill-

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

dams, and do not think that the fish put up as good a fight as they do in rougher waters.

Sometimes we think that we know a great deal about trout and fly-fishing, again that we are absolute ignoramuses. At least I find many of the best anglers everywhere diffident in expressing their opinions and loath to lay down the law. We are constantly learning and unlearning.

It has been well said that fly-fishing affords a wide field for speculation and study. It is only by expressing our opinions and giving our experience that we can draw out others.

Though not favourably situated for observation at present, I have seen a good many small brown ephemera this month. We have a black gnat with clear white wings that hatches out in great numbers in March. There is a large brown ephemeron in some of the limestone streams early in April which is about the colour of the wings of a Pink Wickam. A smaller brown is very abundant in May in mountain streams. The body is dark brown, closely ribbed with gold, dark speckled brown wings and legs and speckled brown tail. This fly becomes much lighter as the weather grows warmer. I think that it changes into a yellow-bodied spinner with blue eyes, but I have always been too late to find it heavily on, and have only secured a few specimens. By the way, I put these flies in small bottles filled with alcohol, as advised by, I think, Mr. Halford. They became much darker and came to pieces in a very annoying way.

I find it very difficult to obtain feathers satisfactory for winging the pale or light-coloured duns. I have imported a few starling feathers, but have usually received only dark ones, and they are rather too small for many of our duns.

I regret that I have not time to dye feathers, quills, etc. Probably great patience is required to ensure good results.

In the early spring all the streams are full, and pure cold water is to be found everywhere. Trout are sometimes found in the most unexpected places, and I think there can be no doubt that they run up from the big rivers, and even from the ocean itself. Large fish are taken in April where later in the season not a trout is to be found. *Fontinalis* and *Irideus* both go to sea when there is nothing to prevent. As to *fario*, I do not know, but probably it will do the same.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

I do not pretend to be an authority upon any subject, and hope that my random notes, if published, will simply be received as jottings by a humble brother who is not particularly fly.

Some years ago I had a fad for small flies and heavy lines, and clung to both until I learned through bitter experience to use larger hooks and as fine a line as would do the work. Why handicap oneself by using flies several sizes smaller than the natural insect? As to lines a well-dressed double-taper E line is heavy enough for dry fly, and I think the G is heavy enough for ordinary small-stream fishing.

Mr. Halford speaks of the impossibility of putting a winged sedge lightly on the water in calm weather (*see* "Dry Fly Entomology," page 155). Would not a light fine line answer on bright, quiet days? It might be necessary also to use a lighter, more supple rod. I would very much like to handle a really first-class dry-fly rod of English make, such as the "Houghton" or "Hardy-Marston," with the reel and line suited to its action attached. I prefer a powerful rod. I have a Hardy 10-oz. "Perfection," but it is old, and I have always thought was made a trifle soft in action to suit the supposed requirements of an American.

## AMERICAN NOTES ON THE BUMBLEPUPPY, ETC.

F. G.      EVERYTHING POINTS TO an early spring over  
APRIL 25, 1903      here, frost is nearly out of the ground, worms have  
come to the surface, and a few bluebirds and robins  
have already arrived from the south.

I never remember hearing the chorus of small frogs so early in the year, but I have reliable evidence that their voices were heard yesterday.

Woodcock began to move in February, and are probably settled in their breeding grounds by this time. I have seen this bird in Georgia as late as March 1, but they are among the leaders in the spring migration.

Many people complain about the weather in March, and speak of it as one of the most detestable months of the year. To me it is delightful as a season of hope; everything is before us: the trout season



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

is close at hand, and from day to day the sun gains power. Constant improvement is the watchword now for several months. April, May, and June are harvest times with the fly-fisher. From July 1 to Aug. 15 the weather is usually too warm for much sport, and our season closes on Sept. 1. We have no grayling to make us happy in September, October, and November, but I hope that this will be remedied in the near future.

The art of illustration has progressed by leaps and bounds in the last decade, yet how few are the books containing satisfactory pictures of natural and artificial flies! Do you know any that are better than the plates in the first and second editions of Ronald's "Entomology," published over sixty years ago? Hand colouring is slow, expensive, and frequently inaccurate. I am sure that some process combining photography and lithography can be found that will give accurate and comparatively inexpensive results. If you study the plates in Mrs. Marbury's "Favourite Flies and their Histories" you will see what I am thinking about. The dry flies are poor, probably because the dressers were not accustomed to this kind of work, but many of the large patterns are absolutely right. One can recognise every feather and the different fibres in a mixed wing. I speak with confidence, as I have seen the original flies sewn on cards and framed just as they were sent to the publishers. This was, I believe, an expensive book, not allowing its author a large margin of profit when sold at \$5, but it is very large and contains an extraordinary number of illustrations.

I enclose the formula of a large fly mentioned in the *Fishing Gazette* some time since. I had intended to send a sample fly to anyone who inquired about it, but the demands of business upon my time have been too great for fly making (I have been trying to arrange a light for night work on the lines laid down by Mr. Halford). This fly has proved attractive to all predatory fish. A good deal depends upon the way it is worked in the water. The celebrated Scotch salmon flies known as the two Eagles are, I believe, nearly always played in this way, possibly with longer and more sweeping movements.

The "Bumble Puppy" is great medicine—there is no doubt of that, after years of trial. Attach a well-made specimen to the end of your cast and play it in clear water. You will see at once that it is very

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

much alive and shows up wonderfully. If jungle-fowl feathers are put on they should open and shut with each movement of the fly. Years ago I sent samples of this fly, dressed salmon fly fashion, to the Editor, but it is difficult to induce anglers to try new patterns if they are peculiar or display combinations not usually approved of.

How easy it is in England to get materials for fly dressing! One can walk into a shop, select exactly what he wants, and pay his money. Here a man wastes time worth many times the money value of the stuff, and has to put up with any trash he can find. I am fond of collecting when I have time and luck, but it is difficult to tie flies that satisfy one's artistic sense with indifferent feathers.

Duns are almost impossible on this side, and most of the fowls are large and coarse.



The entomology of the trout streams of New York and Pennsylvania is extremely interesting, and the number of species very great. I believe that we have insects approximating all those described in English works on the subject and many others. We have many small flies, but as a rule American ephemera are larger than their English equivalents. Naturalists say that we have several species of Mayflies, and I am familiar myself with many dun flies as large as or larger than the English March brown.

I wonder what the trout of the Test or Itchen would say to the horned corydalis,, the image of the "hellgramite" or "dobson"? I have seen heavy rises of this beast in June, but do not think the trout take them as flies, though they do feed on them to some extent in the larval form. The American trout is a game chap. I have seen one not

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over eight inches in length go for a big disabled dragon fly until he got it under and kept it.

I would give much to visit the best of the chalk streams of the Mother Country—Test, Anton, Itchen, Kennet, Colne. They are names to conjure with. Not that I would wish to fish. No; but I would be an interested onlooker if any past master of the dry fly would suffer me to attend his royal highness as a gillie. We have big limestone streams here and there, which must give some notion of a chalk stream, but the surroundings are entirely different.

[The following is the dressing of the "Bumble Puppy" referred to by Mr. Gordon. I feel sure it would kill well on dark days and for evening fishing, as it has quite a ghost-moth kind of appearance.—R. B. M.]

### BUMBLEPUPPY

*Tag*—Silver and red silk. *Tail*—Scarlet ibis, two mated feathers, back to back and quite straight on hook. *Butt*—Red or yellow chenille; have tried black ostrich. *Body*—White silk chenille, ribbed flat silver tinsel (must be bright), body full, not thin. *Hackle*—Badger, large, long, and lots of it. *Wings*—Double or single, according to size of hook; strips of white swan or goose, over white hair from deer, white bear, or goat. *Sides*—Jungle fowl, low. *Shoulder hackle*—Over wing, a good widgeon feather as long as or longer than the badger. *Head*—Red or yellow chenille, or black, plain varnished.

### AMERICAN NOTES

F. G.  
MAY 16, 1903

FROM ALL REPORTS the early fishing is unusually good this spring in eastern New York and Pennsylvania, but the weather has been quite cold, with high winds. In some localities ice formed an inch in thickness on still water near the Beavercill last week. Trout are running large, and about one-half of the baskets have been *fario* and the other half *fontinalis*. The high water of last year preserved the fish, and from now on until late in June sport should be good. Some years ago Mr. James Ogden sent me a pattern of his hackled May fly, and I have found that a fly tied

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

in the same way, but with a yellow dun hackle right down the body, is very killing on some of our large streams in May and June. It is on the order of the Egyptian goose Nymph illustrated in Mr. F. M. Halford's works. The ridiculously long hackle does not interfere with hooking the fish, although I had expected that it would. Sometimes trout do not take a dry fly well, they flop at and try to drown it. I remember seeing it stated (in Primes' charming book "I Go a-Fishing," I believe) that trout always struck a fly with their tails before seizing it. They may do this at times, certainly not always. Anyone who has not read that book, however, has a treat in hand. I place it on the same shelf with "Little Rivers."



There cannot be much doubt that it adds to the pleasure of fishing to take trout with flies made by the angler's own fingers, but many men cannot find time either to learn to tie flies or to collect the materials necessary. I know that I find it rather laborious to make flies at night after a long day on business intent. The great trouble in this country is to get feathers and other things pertaining to these counterfeit presentments. That takes much time and patience, and it is practically impossible to find some of the articles readily obtainable in England. I know a number of men who make split-bamboo rods for their own use, and this is far more difficult than fly making. It is interesting to note the different styles and actions of rods turned out to suit individual peculiarities. One friend makes his rods as stiff as pokers in the lower joints, the top running down very fine and flexible. This is to prevent the fine-drawn gut he uses habitually from being broken in the strike. I could not cast thirty feet comfortably with one

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

of these rods. Another friend fishes with a little 8-foot rod and a big handle; the rod proper weighs almost nothing, though the handle carries the weight up to over 8 oz. Many men, many minds. The most magnificent weapon I ever possessed was ridiculed by a relation of mine who is a good fisherman. I wish that the good anglers of England, with whom it is an article of faith that the American rod is whippy and trifling, could see some of the rods I have handled recently. One thing I am sure of, and that is with an American rod of 10 oz. to 11 oz. and suitable line and reel the largest salmon can be landed in a reasonable time. Such a rod would cost about £8 sterling.

### AMERICAN NOTES

F. G.  
SEPTEMBER 12,  
1903

HAS ANYONE ever tried dry-fly fishing for salmon? Laugh, if you please. It is not impossible, and just imagine how wildly exciting it would be to have the king of fish take a floating fly! I believe there are recorded instances of a new Jock Scott having been taken before it sank, but I can only give one instance of a salmon rising at a dry fly from knowledge. Before I had enough materials to tie any of the standard patterns, I made a few flies for a friend who was going to Canada and who hoped to have an opportunity to wet a line. One of these queer flies was something like the ordinary Coachman. It was tied on a No. 2 loop-eyed Pennell, with two white duck feathers for wings. These were perfectly upright on the hook and stiff as pokers. Tail, a smart crest, with a few turns of yellow silk and a fat body of herl. Underneath the wings I wound, dry-fly fashion, a long brown saddle hackle.\*

Late in the season my friend was given three days on the Restigouche, and lost no time in getting to the water, which was some distance up the river. He knew nothing of fly-fishing, and worked hard until late in the afternoon without a rise. Then his guide, as a forlorn

\* I have omitted earlier versions of this story, which Gordon told in the April 4, 1903, issue of *Forest and Stream*, and the April 25 issue of the *Fishing Gazette*. In the former he gave a more complete description of this dry salmon fly, as follows: "It was tied with two stiff white wings, made of whole feathers, upright on the hook, peacock herl body, yellow butt, golden pheasant tail, silver tag, and a very full long brown hackle." In other versions he gives the hook size as Pennell No. 1.—Ed.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

hope, I presume, noosed my Coachman on to the cast and bid him try again. A short throw was made from the canoc, and, to use the angler's own words, "that fly sat on the water like a boat," cocking its sail-like wings vigorously.

This was too much for one 14½-lb salmon, which rose and tried to take the fly as it floated gently downstream. The stiff wings and bushy hackle were against the fish, and it was only at the third effort that the fly was actually absorbed. These preliminaries were very trying to a novice in fly-fishing, consequently he struck too hard and broke his rod, *which was borrowed*. Fortunately the hold was good, and after a struggle lasting two hours and a half, the salmon came to gaff, creating for the time being a very happy man.

This was certainly a clear case. The cast was made so that there was slack line, the current was gentle, and the fly was allowed to float because it interested the fisherman to see it. If that salmon did not take that fly for a large moth or insect of some kind I am greatly mistaken. Given the opportunity, I should not hesitate to try the salmon with a big dry fly, particularly if I saw one rise.

The weather gods have been in a peculiar mood this spring, and while we in the east are praying for rain, the people a few hundred miles to the westward are being overwhelmed by floods. In this part of the country only one-fifth of an inch of moisture was precipitated the whole month of May. The fine weather early in the season was very favourable to anglers, and from the streams of New York and Pennsylvania to the lakes far up in Maine came reports of the best fishing in years in many localities. Many large trout have been taken, and I should say that the average nearly everywhere was unusually good. The long-continued drought has, however, put an end to this delightful state of affairs, and now we hear complaints of dwindling streams, bright water, and very shy fish. As far as I am concerned, I rather enjoy trout-fishing under these conditions, if the water only remains cold. The fish are very smart, of course, but one knows where they are, and with fine tackle and small flies sport is quite possible. The down-stream enthusiast is nowhere under these conditions of weather and water.

The longed-for rain began to descend a week ago, and has fa-

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

voured us quite constantly ever since. The parched lawns are reviving, and it is possible that the hay crop may not be a total failure after all. June is a delightful month with us, and there are still several weeks before the hot wave which usually makes itself felt early in July. Many anglers have already taken advantage of the change in the weather, but I fear that the streams will be found in flood by the unfortunates who did not get away until the week-end. Of course, the tributary brooks can be fished with bait, but worm fishing is not what we want. I confess that I am opposed even to upstream clear-water worming.

It seems to me that the addition of clear water to worm is sufficient to glorify the garden hackle and elevate it to a place above the artificial fly in the estimation of many fishermen on your side of the Atlantic. It is worming just the same, and no one can deny that it is death to small trout. There are so many fish that do not rise to the fly, and for which bait is legitimate, that the trout might easily be spared. Small mountain streams can be practically depopulated by bait fishing, never by fly alone. Our eastern brook trout (*fontinalis*) has a weakness for worm when small, and *fario* probably the same. I do not think that the rainbow trout cares much about worm, preferring flies and minnows. It seldom indulges in cannibalism as far as I can learn, being in this respect quite different from the other trout mentioned.

We can never repay the debt we owe to Mr. Frederic M. Halford, but I often wish that he would add to the burden by descending into personalities and giving more of his experiences in dry-fly fishing. There are so many of us who only get a few days on the water during the season, and must enjoy most of our sport by proxy. For many years I had at least two months with the trout, but this season my opportunities have been few and far between. The evening after the arrival of the *Fishing Gazette* is marked with a white stone, and I feel supremely grateful to those who write of their sport, particularly when the scene of action is pictured and one gets a glimpse of some skilful work with dry fly. There is really so much to be told if the narrator is a good observer. By the way, what a shock it was to learn that the alderfly is never on the water! What would Charles Kingsley have said to anyone who told him that his black or brown alder (I forget what he called it) never gave the trout a chance to gobble it. For years

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

I thought it great medicine, when tied on a small hook, and it is only about ten years since it was displaced in my affections by certain dove-coloured insects. It is really dreadful to discover how little one knows, and the worst of it is that the older we get the more we realise how horribly ignorant we are. It is so pleasant to feel wise that after all is said it would certainly be better to die young.

The more I study the imitation of the natural fly and the various books on the subject (or which treat of it), the surer I am that trout have a wonderful eye for colour but a very indifferent notion of form. There is any quantity of evidence; but take your mayfly alone and note the curious buzzards that are mistaken for the natural, particularly hackle patterns that are deadly because so nearly right in colour. Shadows alarm trout greatly. Your shadow is more alarming than your bodily presence. But colour is another story altogether. How often have all anglers of experience had to acknowledge that the most trifling difference in colour made all the difference between a bad creel and a good one. Trout are wonderful animals, and their apparent vagaries might very well puzzle a Halford or a Marryat. Occasionally our faith in the art and science of fly-fishing is shaken, and we know not what to do. In the early spring sometimes it is quite useless to fish upstream or to use the dry fly. We must resort to salmon fishing tactics, cast across and down, and hang the fly over the lies of the fish. Sometimes they take under water again; the only way to get fish is to play a drop fly on the surface. This is one reason why I usually enjoy the later fishing more than the early days, when the biggest baskets are often made. The trout are well on the natural, they are in fine condition, and appreciate all the art and care we can devote to them.

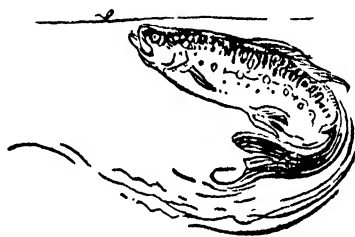
Before wood rods were displaced by the split bamboo, lancewood was a favourite material in this country; greenheart could be had if ordered, but lancewood alone or in combination with ash or other hard wood always had the preference, and I have seen some of these wooden rods that were really excellent. About fifteen years ago I bought a little all-lancewood rod for a young relation of mine. It was nine feet long and weighed  $4\frac{1}{2}$  oz., but in spite of its light weight it became the favourite rod with the older members of the household.



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

It was used for many purposes, even for bait fishing, and landed several bass over 4 lb. in weight. There were several fine rods owned by members of the family, yet this little rod was invariably preferred.

Why was this? For the simple reason that among a number of rods the lightest, if of good quality, will always come to the front and remain there. Go fishing where you please, to the wilds of Maine or Canada, for instance, where the trout run large. Take heavy and light rods with you, and in a few days the weighty weapons of, say 8 oz. to 10 oz. will remain in their cases, and the little rod of 5 oz. or 6 oz. will do all the work. I have seen this again and again, and many other men have noted the same results.



## A PLEASANT NOTE FROM AMERICA

F. G. I HAVE BEEN very busy and not too well. Have enjoyed only vicarious sport in reading the *Fishing Gazette*. What I should do without your paper I do not know. When too tired or too unwell to read anything or work at anything, I can find rest for mind and diversion in some of the back numbers, which I have already read. There are so many good things in it, so many interesting arguments and discussions; I know of no other journal at all like it. I wish that it was possible for you [Marston] to give more of your own experience. I will try to send you something that may at least answer for a little padding when you may be at a loss.

MARCH 5, 1904

Our little club, the Fly Fishers, held its annual dinner at the

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

Union League on February 6. Thirty-four sat down, and we enjoyed the good music, good fellowship, and good cheer most thoroughly.

On this side of the Atlantic we have been experiencing the severest winter within the recollection of the oldest inhabitant. Zero weather has ceased to call forth comment, and the thermometer in one of its frequent drops reached 18 deg. below. This, too, quite near the coast, within thirty miles of New York, where the winters are much milder than farther up the Hudson River. Everyone goes on runners, and a wheeled vehicle has been a rare sight for at least two months. The river at this point is four miles wide, and is frozen from shore to shore. There is much travel over the frozen surface, and the ice is probably thick enough for railway traffic. This is all very fine from the point of view of the ice yachtsmen, the skaters, and those who love sleighing; but how about the game and fish? The ruffed grouse can stand it, but I fear the quail, or Virginia partridge, has been exterminated by the deep snow and lack of food. The danger to the trout will come when the ice breaks up, as the woods are full of snow and the ice very heavy. Should the break-up be sudden, ice gorges and high water may do immense damage. A gorge is formed, for instance, backing up a large body of water behind it; then if the pressure becomes too great, the whole mass gives away at once, and an enormous quantity of heavy ice goes down with the flood, carrying everything before it. After such an event trout have been found scattered far and wide at great distances from the stream. It is sad to find many of one's favourite pools on a well-known river changed beyond recognition. This is but too frequently the case with mountain streams flowing through deep valleys and having a rapid descent. However, if all goes well when spring opens, good sport may be expected during the early months of the season at least. From May onward last year the trout brooks were never low, and many fish were seen upon the spawning beds at the mouths of the cold brooks and up the tributary streams of the larger trout rivers.



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

There seems to be no limit to the size to which the brown trout will grow under favourable conditions. One was reported from the lower Beaverkill last fall, which was over three feet long, and should have weighed—well, anything you please. The lower Beaverkill, however, is a very large river after being joined by the Willowemoc, quite large enough to hold heavy salmon, and there is no limit to the food supply—small fish, minnows, etc. *Salmo fario* is a sturdy fellow, and holds his own (and more, too) whenever and wherever he gets a chance. The rainbow is a great favourite of mine, but does not succeed everywhere as the brown trout does.

There is no doubt that the dry fly has effected a lodgment over here, and is gaining ground year by year. I think that it is about ten years since some of our best fishermen began to fish dry in summer, when the water was low and clear. This was on hard-fished waters in this State. Now one can buy any quantity of quill gnats, Mayflies, spinners, etc., in the best shops. Nearly all of these are tied in England. The turned-wing fly is still a great favourite in this country.

I am sorry to say that free water is decreasing rapidly. It will soon be impossible to get a day's sport within a hundred miles of our large cities without being a member of a club or paying for the privilege in some way. I would not care to fish only in a well-stocked preserve, and as for catching trout that I had bred and raised, I fear that such sport would possess few attractions for me.

The eyed *versus* plain hook controversy will never be settled. Many anglers dislike exceedingly the business of knotting, and cling to the old short snell and gut loops. This is not neat, but it is certainly convenient. I know a number of men who swear by the Pennell eyed hook, and I use them largely in my own fishing. I like the form of this hook, but the great recommendation is being enabled by their use to carry a large quantity of flies in a box and use any thickness of gut required. Most of the flies I use are tied dry-fly fashion, and have sufficient hackle to float well. Two years ago in trying to match the colour of a very light or pale dun I used a kind of fleecy wool for the

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

body, and several friends fancied the pattern. Much to my surprise they all report that this woolly fly floats like a haystack—in fact, is almost unsinkable. This is very extraordinary, and has puzzled me greatly. The evidence comes from too many sources to admit of doubt.

Some time ago an article in the *Fishing Gazette* attributed something like reasoning power to a hawk, which killed again and again, the idea being that this was to supply future wants. I think this is an error. There are several hawks in this country, very bold and powerful upon the wing, though not large, that will follow their prey to the last survivor, killing for the love of killing. A flock of ducks will be followed until they reach the water, but only one—sometimes none—will be carried off for food. The vulgar name for one of these birds is the “bullet hawk,” on account, I presume, of the speed of its flight, which is very great. It strikes from a considerable height, and descends upon its object with the rapidity of lightning. Everyone knows how fast a scared dove can fly, yet I never saw one escape from the pounce of this hawk. In one instance I heard a rushing sound in the air, and the next instant one of two doves, which were flying at a great pace, was struck down. I shot the hawk immediately, but the dove was dead, the talons being buried to the vital organs.

Great numbers of that fine game fish the rock-fish, or striped bass, are taken through the ice on the Hudson River. These fish winter in brackish water, floating up and down for short distances with the tide. The fishermen take advantage of this by cutting lanes in the ice, in which their nets are set. The fish are quite dull and logy, and do not seem to struggle much when they drift against the nets. Lines are attached to the lower edges of the nets, and they are pulled up from above when the tide is ebbing, and from below when the tide is flooding.

The striped bass afford great sport to anglers with rod and reel, and has been taken above 60 lb. weight. It is a silvery, graceful fish, game to the backbone. Menhaden is largely used as bait on the sea coast (an oily, bony fish from which fertilisers are made), and shedder crab, blood worms, minnows, etc., in the estuaries of rivers. I have

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

heard that sturgeon roe is a good bait. The tackle used off Newport, Block Island, Cuttyhunk, etc., is quite costly. The rod, often of split bamboo, has guides on both sides. Agate is used to diminish friction in casting, and the large multiplying reel has frequently jewelled bearings. Casts of 40 yds. are made without other weight than the hook and menhaden bait. I once saw a Negro take a 45½-lb. striped bass with a cane pole, to which the line was fastened. He was fishing with large shrimp for bait from a boat, and finding that he had hooked a fish too powerful for his tackle, he threw the rod overboard and let it go. Much of the rod was frequently submerged in the rushes of the fish, but the light, buoyant cane, always yielding, yet constantly dragging at a noble bass, which never sulked, finally killed him. The boat was in constant attendance, and the fish was gripped by the gills and lifted in. I see that the taste for salt-water fishing is growing rapidly in Great Britain. Where the tides are not too strong great sport may be had, but heavy leads are certainly a drawback.

After such a winter as the present we may reasonably look forward to genuine spring weather soon after the vernal equinox, and now is the time to put our tackle in order, tie flies, and furbish up our weapons. The good housewife is sometimes a very trying person to the angler, giving away or hiding his old clothes, putting his treasures beyond his knowledge, and, like the mother of Barrie's "Little Minister," packing things in boxes, and hiding said boxes in the most inaccessible closets. However, we could not live or be happy without our greatest blessing—woman.



## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

### FLY-FISHING NEAR NEW YORK

F. S.  
MARCH 19, 1904

FIFTY YEARS AGO sport of any description had small place in the thoughts and lives of the American people; in fact, the word was seldom used except to express something "fast," and not to be encouraged. Now we are becoming a nation of sportsmen and sportswomen, and are all alive to outdoor amusements and recreations. The benefit resulting from this change in public sentiment is perhaps more marked in the women than in the men, as very possibly it was more needed. No one of mature years can fail to have marked the increased stature and healthfulness of our women. The ideal heroine nowadays is far removed from the wasp-waisted, die-away creature of the early portion of the last century. The girl of the twentieth century is a fine upstanding woman, with a flat back, large frame, and the limbs of a Juno. This article, however, has to do not with angels but with sport.

Since the time of Walton, great numbers of the best and wisest men have evinced a love of fly-fishing amounting to a passion, and the increase in the votaries of the sport in recent years has been in the nature of a geometrical progression. There are one hundred fly-fishers now where one was found fifty years ago. Only a minority of intrepid anglers can hie away to the lakes of Maine or the salmon rivers of the Dominion; the preserves of Long Island and the mountain streams of New York must receive the great majority. The demand upon these waters has thus become very great, and they would long ere this have proved inadequate if the genius of modern fishculture had not stepped in to fill the breach.

We have good spring trout fishing within a short distance of New York City, but the facilities for sport, and the size and number of fish can be largely increased if all the natural advantages of the country are fully developed. We may even have a season for fly-fishing in the autumn, such as we hear of as being enjoyed elsewhere. There are many good streams in the East, but for the purposes of this article, we will confine our attention to a few nearby waters, and perhaps make one or two suggestions in regard to them. They are easily reached by two lines of rail, and the region through which they flow is visited

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

annually by thousands of health and pleasure seekers. We refer to five well-known historic streams, having almost a common source, but flowing on widely diverging courses, three being tributary to the Delaware and two to the Hudson River. These are the Esopus and Big Indian, the Neversink, Willowemoc, and Beaverkill. The first two are practically one, the Esopus being formed by the junction of the Big Indian with a small brook called Birch Creek, a short distance from Big Indian station. The Big Indian has its source away up in Big Indian mountain, one of the highest peaks in the Catskills, and within a few yards is a small trickle of ice-cold water which is the beginning of the West Branch of the Neversink. The East Branch rises a little east and south, and the Willowemoc north and west, as we remember the points of the compass, and the sources of the Beaverkill are not far away. All these are ideal trout streams, and will well repay the lover of nature as well as the angler. All are clear, cold, and pure, the water of the Neversink being as limpid as air, the smallest object can be seen distinctly at a depth of many feet.

Ten or twelve years ago the native brook trout—*Salvelinus fontinalis*—was master of all the brooks in this section, as they met all the requirements of its somewhat fastidious fancy, but now—chiefly owing to the wisdom and liberality of the State of New York—we have several varieties, all beautiful and sport-giving fish. Even at an earlier date (i. e., more than ten years since), the rainbow trout of the West (*Salmo irideus*) had found a congenial home in the Esopus and thriven amazingly, thus affording good fly-fishing where formerly there was little or none. I am referring now to the lower part of the river. It is claimed by some fishculturists that the rainbow trout can live and grow in water of too high a temperature for many other members of the salmon family. The brown trout (*Salmo fario*) has usurped first place in the Big Indian. This is the common European species, the trout of the British Isles. It is hardy and prolific, and within the last three years has greatly increased in the lower Esopus. The rainbow is still most abundant in this portion of the river, at least until the second falls is reached. Below these the black bass has, I am informed, taken possession. The Beaverkill holds brook, brown, and rainbow trout, but only a few fry of the last named have been released in it.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

The same may be said of the Neversink, and the stock of the Willow-mock consists, or consisted very recently, almost entirely of native brook trout above Livingstone Manor. Clubs and individuals have released many fry and yearlings in these waters, and the Ontario and Western Railroad has carried millions of fry, besides giving transportation to parties engaged in carrying young trout from the State hatcheries.

July and August were formerly good months for fly-fishing in the streams we have mentioned, as they flow at considerable altitudes, but until the season of 1903 our mountain summers, though very pleasant, have been warmer than of yore. Climatic changes are going on all over the country, the rainfall is less evenly distributed, and the streams get lower and warmer. The last season was all that we could desire in the matter of rainfall after the first of June, but we have had a number of very serious droughts in recent years. In fact, we have been experiencing some of the inconveniences felt in the United Kingdom from modern drainage, forest destruction, and the like. Thirty or forty years ago much of this region was a sea of hemlock, more snow fell and it remained longer, having more protection from the sun. Now deciduous trees have replaced the evergreen forest, and the appearance of the country is greatly changed. It must have looked a wild and savage region one hundred years ago.

The fishing has had many ups and downs. In the days of the first settlers the trout were only too abundant, but we believe that sport is better now than it was thirty years since. Tanneries were located on nearly all trout waters, and log driving and lumbering were constantly going on. There were but few trout below the tanneries, and though they fairly swarmed in the small brooks they were trifling in size and could have afforded but little sport. We have had sufficient experience of this kind of fishing.

On first consideration some objections will appear to a fly-fishing season in the autumn months, but these will be found to be more sentimental than real. The brown and brook trout will be working up into the small brooks and on to the spawning beds, and the few taken would be promptly returned. They could not be exposed, and but few persons would care to retain them for food, as, being out of condition,



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

they would soon after death become slimy and unpleasant objects. The rainbows and the grayling would be in the highest possible condition and afford the very best of sport. The season in Colorado runs to October 31, and there are many brown trout and some brook trout in that State now. In Oregon it is said that the big rainbow trout do not come up from the sea until the month of July.

Grayling were introduced into the Scottish Tweed and Clyde from England years ago, and have become abundant in those rivers. We should consider all proposals or suggestions bearing upon an increased supply of game fish, and there are miles of the Beaverkill and Neversink that might be greatly improved. The European grayling and the trout do well together, or in the same river, and there is no good reason why our season for fly-fishing should be so short. With scientific fishculture and good management there is no need to fear that our streams will be depleted by any amount of fair fishing. Dry summers, ice jams, and great floods in winter and fall are the dangerous features in the situation.

Many other streams besides those mentioned are easily accessible from New York City, and we know of no pleasanter way of spending the summer vacation than rambling from one to another, casting one's flies as the spirit moveth. It is easy to travel cheaply all over the region we have referred to. You can go in by way of the Ulster and Delaware and return by the Ontario and Western Railroad. If not in a great hurry, one can travel by the mail hacks which run from Big Indian to Claryville, and thence to Liberty. In fact, these mail hacks will be found making their daily pilgrimages in every valley, and up and down nearly all these rivers. Claryville is on the Neversink, at the junction of the East and West branches; over the next divide is the Willowemoc, and in the valley beyond flows the beautiful Beaverkill, which many people consider one of the most perfect trout rivers in this country. A large portion of the water is posted, but by staying at various farmhouses and summer resorts, enough fishing can be had to satisfy a reasonable person. In the early season good sport is had in the lower reaches in free water. In July and August the angler must seek cooler water far up the stream.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

### FLIES THAT FEED THE TROUT

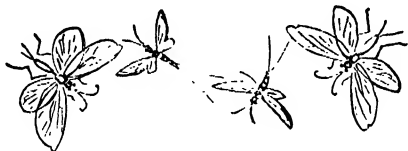
F. S.  
APRIL 9, 1904

NOTHING EXCITES the ardent angler more than seeing a large trout rising steadily, which he cannot induce to take his flies. I am speaking now of fish that are really feeding upon surface food, and not playing. If the right fly is at last found and success follows, great is the joy of our friend. He attributes the result entirely to his own skill and feels proud of himself accordingly, and is apt thereafter to pay more attention to the natural flies that he sees on or about the water. There is no doubt that the study of entomology would add considerably to the interest of fly-fishing, at least in many of the streams of New York and Pennsylvania. I know of no work upon the subject that is of much assistance to the angler, and he will often be at a loss in trying to identify an insect which he finds is attractive to the fish. The habit is formed, however, of noting the flies as they appear, and he will often be astonished at the numbers which hatch out when the weather is favorable. He learns to be a good judge of color and size, and finds that a comparatively small assortment of flies will enable him to imitate the naturals, if he fishes in the same locality. The scientific side of the question, with Latin names, etc., is not of the first importance to the fisherman, yet I hope that in the near future some well-equipped naturalist will take up the subject of stream flies. I believe that four families comprise the major part of the insects found on the cold, clear brooks and rivers of the Middle States; the *Ephemeridæ*, to which the mayflies, red, brown and golden spinners, and the different colored duns belong; the *Perlidæ*, stone flies, willow fly, etc; *Diptera*, all the black gnats, etc.; and the *Trichoptera*, all the caddis flies. Ephemera are very numerous and are easily known by the upright wings and long, tapering body, curved upward at the tail and terminating in two or three whisks, which are frequently mottled.

Nearly everyone has noticed the big stone fly which hatches out irregularly all through the season, when the weather is not too warm. I have never seen this fly in large numbers, though a yellowish stone fly that is a little smaller comes out in great force sometimes in the latter part of May or early June. As with all these insects, the tempera-

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

ture of the air and water has everything to do with the time when they appear. The wings of the stone flies lie flat upon the back when at rest, and are four in number. They make a fine show when expanded, and the fly itself is a fat and juicy morsel for the trout. I do not think that the fish get many of these insects in a perfect state, but when they are crawling about waiting for their wings to grow the trout have a better opportunity. I have found many in their stomachs. Everyone has seen the case which these flies leave upon the rocks after they have hatched out. I have an idea that one of our stone flies comes out of the larval case at night, at least I have found many cases of a rather small fly which I could not follow in its metamorphoses.



The *Diptera* form a very large family by themselves, the first to appear being a black gnat with clear wings, early in the month of March. There are more or less of these little creatures about at all seasons, but I do not know much about them. Some are so small as to be scarcely visible without the aid of a magnifying glass.

The *Trichoptera*, or caddis flies, are a host in themselves, and their numbers are, at times, almost beyond belief. The larger members of this family make their houses of sticks, and until they are seen crawling about will be thought to be sticks in reality. Vast quantities may be found in many waters in the month of June. The smaller caddis use small stones and sand to build their homes. All are beautifully made, and are as smooth as satin inside. Trout when hungry will swallow the caddis, case and all. The remains of the cases can often be found in the stomachs of large brown trout, usually the stick kind. In western North Carolina the caddis is called "stick bait," and has always been used in trout fishing. The Indians of this State made use of the deer-hair hackle or buck-tail fly long before the country was settled by the whites. I cannot vouch for this, but my informant was

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a gentleman who was passionately fond of "The Land of the Sky." I would like to know how the aborigines made their hooks.

All the water flies are quite hardy and are best observed during the early part of the season. As soon as the temperature of the water rises they cease to hatch out in any number. I say the temperature of the water, because one can find a good many flies about during the hot weather if he seeks the headwaters of the brook, where it is cool. The hatch will be confined to the evening and early morning hours, as the hot sun is not favorable to any of these insects and may be fatal to some. In 1903 the month of March was unusually mild, many flies were on the water and trout were rising in our mountain streams just as they do in May. I have seen great numbers of ephemera hatching out in April, and have taken a basket of trout while the snow was falling. Of course, I do not mean that the air was very cold; the snow melted about as fast as it fell.

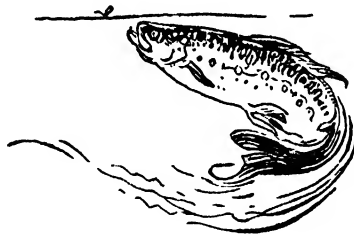
At first the trout are hungry and foolish, and will take almost any fly, but they soon learn to be cautious and discriminating. Some patterns of flies will kill more or less all through the season, but when the fish get well on to a particular color, more trout and a better average will be secured with a good copy of the natural. The color of the body is of the first importance. I remember a fly that was only good for a short time during one season, and that was a period of about three weeks in August. I have seen a few in subsequent years, but only a few. The water was low and the trout very shy, but, thanks to a good imitation of this small fly, I enjoyed most excellent sport among the large trout. I tried many experiments with other flies and compared results with other fishermen, and this fly easily led all others while the natural was about. In the matter of size (of fish taken), the difference was very remarkable. I have been led away from my subject proper. It is so easy to get off the track when writing on these matters.

I know so little of entomology that I do not pretend to instruct anyone. I only hope that a more competent person may take up the study of the insect life of our trout streams. I do not advise the slavish following of the imitative theory, I only claim that on some streams (particularly where there is much still water), a copy of the natural fly upon the water will often give one a good basket of trout when all

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

other artificial flies are nearly, if not quite, useless. Again, big trout that confine themselves practically to a fish diet are not often to be lured to the surface by small insects, yet may be taken by a large moth, particularly if fished for at night.

To me, the ephemera, or day flies, are the most interesting. It was formerly thought that they lived only for a day, hence the name. As inhabitants of the air, their life history is short, not extending over a period of much more than two weeks, I believe, in any member of the family, but as larval insects in the depths, they pass from one to two years. If the water is shut off from a mill race or any similar place, and the bottom proves to be composed of stones, sand and gravel, it will be found very interesting to appoint oneself a committee of investigation. The number of larvæ of various sorts and kinds will usually prove surprising. Many sizes will be found; brown, dull yellow, olive and dark orange are the common colors. All have good strong mandibles or pincers to seize their food, and all, or at least those I have found, of the ephemeral species are active and full of life. When the time comes for these creatures to change their habitat, they swim upward to the surface, the shell of the larval forms splits down the back and the winged insect emerges, sometimes with a rapidity that almost defies the sight, and again slowly and with difficulty.



How the change can be made in the former way puzzles me. I have occasionally been able to take up a position directly above the place where the larvæ or nymph was hatching. In one instance the fly was a large one and I fancied that I could see the larvæ shooting up. The next instant two or three flies were floating downstream with their big wings erect upon their backs. In another instance, a very

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small insect was hatching out in swarms at short intervals. It was an unusually cold day, with blasts of wind and rain. After each flurry of wind and rain, the sun would peep out, and instantly the hatch would come on and the trout be seen rising all over the pools. I took a small space on the water for observation. One moment it would be vacant, the next a dozen little flies would be dancing on the surface. What this fly was I do not know; it was surely not an ephemera. I was too intent on my fishing during the short time that the fish were rising to catch any specimens. I think that the flies were coming up too far out to do so, in any event. Strange as it may seem, a tiny coddling fly was a good imitation of this natural, and I took 63 trout in a short time, returning all of these except the best fish. After hatching out, the ephemera have to undergo a second transformation, from the dun to the spinner, or perfect insect. In the former state the colors are quite dull and the wings opaque. As soon as their wings gain strength the insect flies to the shore and hides among the bushes. After remaining in this condition for some days, it sheds its whole covering, coming out in bright colors and with clear, glassy, sparkling wings. These wings, by the way, cannot be well imitated, and the best thing to do is to dress the fly hackles only. (A hackle with dark center and golden edge answers for wings and legs.) As duns and spinners these flies do not feed at all, their only duty in this latter state being to perpetuate their species. The males may be seen dancing up and down in the air, usually in the evening. They are then on the watch for the females, which are quickly caught when they leave the bushes in which they have sought shelter. The nuptial rites take place in the air and soon after the females deposit their eggs upon the water. Their existence terminates soon after, as both male and female are reduced to mere shells. The little egg quickly sinks to the bottom, on which it finds a lodgment among stones and gravel. In a few weeks it becomes a larvæ, to follow its destiny as described.

When the stone fly wishes to change its shell it crawls out upon a stone and, gripping tight with its powerful claws, splits down the back and with considerable difficulty emerges. It is not in condition to fly, and is obliged to slink about under rocks, etc., until its wings are perfectly formed. It goes through no second transformation. I do

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not remember ever seeing stone flies heavily on, though I have seen great numbers in the act of laying their eggs. These were of the yellow kind, and, although they were extremely clumsy, often being carried down for several yards by the current, not a trout touched them. I was told, however, that earlier in the season they were well taken.

I know nothing worth mentioning in regard to the diptera or their life history. I have had fine sport with a small black gnat. It is a good pattern for night or late evening fishing. The caddis flies hatch out largely at night, and are perhaps the most numerous of all the insects found upon our trout waters. They allow the angler few opportunities to study them, as he is too busy during the short hour or two allowed him after the sun is off the water to spare time to secure specimens or to study their life history. Quantities may be taken by means of an exposed lamp, however. We know that they hatch out in swarms and are well taken by the fish. They have the power of secreting a bubble of air at the end of the case, but I doubt whether this would enable them to rise to the surface, though I have heard that they did so. This is entirely unnecessary, as they move about the bottom from place to place, and can readily crawl out upon the shore or a stone when they wish to change their mode of life. They present a variety of colors, but the majority are brown, in many shades. The wings form a roof over the body and extend beyond it. The family of crane flies is a large one, the best known and most esteemed member being our friend the mosquito. Fortunately this is one of the smallest of the tribe, others being an inch in length. If we had mosquitoes of this size and proportionately ferocious, life would be intolerable in many parts of the country. The next best known is the herry-long-legs, and I have found him in several colors, brown, dull orange and yellow.

No one who spends even a very little time in the study of insect life can fail to be astonished by the infinite variety and great numbers of species, varieties and colors of trout flies. They fill an important place in nature, acting as scavengers in the larval stage and feeding the fish all through their existence. The birds and possibly other creatures also take heavy toll at times. They are among the most beautiful of all insects, delicate in form and exquisite in color. To me the ephemera are more beautiful than any of the moths, wonderful as are the

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

coloring and markings of the latter. We have seen several handsome books treating of moths, butterflies and others, with excellent illustrations. Considerable attention has been given to the inhabitants of stagnant pools and ponds, but the insects which feed the trout have been neglected in this country. Some day I intend to import all the English works I can find that treat of the subject, but we would like to be able to identify our native flies when found during our fishing rambles. Unless I am much in error we have a greater number of species, and there are such differences in the insects found upon streams and lakes in various parts of the country that no foreign work would be satisfactory.

From my small experience, I should say that the same species may not be found in waters not 50 miles apart. Some are common to all, while others are peculiar to a district or even to a stream. On a large river more big flies will be found. In petty brooks, the flies will be for the most part small, though the great stone fly appears nearly everywhere I have been in this State. It is said that we have several kinds of mayflies, some of them much larger than the old-country type.

We certainly have one fly bigger than anything to be found across the Atlantic. That is the horned corydalis, the larvæ of which fills such an important place as a bait for the black bass. I refer to the hellgramite, or dobson. This is a queer beast. I have seen it appear in large numbers early in June. That is, the fly hatched out at that time. Its habits are very peculiar, as after living as a larvæ in the rapids of our streams for a year or more, it comes out and burrows in the soil. Some people say that it returns to the water before becoming a fly, but I have found it in the transition stage upon land, before it was perfectly developed. All the corydalis I have seen, when I observed them, were headed upstream and were flying rapidly. One evening (it was always late in the afternoon that they appeared) I saw a number of individuals strike the water in a river where there were many trout, but they were not taken. I also caught several and threw them in at the top of a big pool without result. The trout were probably afraid of such a huge black thing. I have heard of the capture of at least one big trout with the hellgramite as bait, and there are few better for bass. I have but touched upon the subject of the flies that feed the



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trout, as I feel my lack of thorough equipment to treat it as it should be done. I crave indulgence for scanty information and probable errors, pleading my love for all things connected with fly-fishing in extenuation.

### AMERICAN NOTES

F. G.        MANY AMERICAN anglers, I believe, promise themselves a visit to Winchester at some time in the future.  
APRIL 30, 1904    I saw some photographs of the Itchen and of Itchen trout recently that interested me greatly. I think that we can duplicate many things found in the old country, and that an Englishman would find that some of the fish for instance greatly resembled species with which he is familiar at home. Our native trout, as far as habits go, are much the same fish, but he will now catch the genuine brown or yellow trout in many parts of this country. The fall fish, wind-fish or chub, a silvery, well-made fish, is almost the English chub, but does not grow so large, and never exceeds 3 lb. In fact, I never saw one that weighed much more than 2 lb. It takes grasshoppers, white grubs, mussels, minnows, etc. I have caught the smaller ones with trout flies, and it gives fair sport in some large creeks, where better fish are not to be found. The flesh is white and sweet, but full of bones.

The yellow perch, so numerous in all our ponds and lakes, does not differ in any way from your fish of the same name. Pike are very pikey anywhere. We are quite rich in pikes and pickerels, and have the pike-perch also, which is shaped like the pike and finned after the manner of the perch. Our roach is a small fish, and not of much consequence. It is like a roach, but does not rise to the dignity of even ½ lb. weight. We have bream at the South, and, if inquiry was pursued, I do not doubt that we have numerous species that would make you feel at home when you caught them.

I confess that it surprises me to read of so great a variety of game and common fish being taken in the same stream—salmon, trout, pike, chub, roach, barbel, bream, perch, etc., all apparently having their

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

homes in close juxtaposition. Here the game fish are only found in pure, cold waters, rivers, lakes, or streams. How can trout flourish in the Thames for instance? There is not so much of that skilled fishing for the fish you term coarse over here. We know little of ground-bait. A friend who visited the river and had permission to fish tells me that he could catch nothing over a pound, the big fish being too smart for him. I think he showed great skill in taking any trout at all. Now and then we have all experienced something like a fit of sulks, or may I call it atheism? We lose faith in all our favourite fetiches, and are tempted to follow false gods. The trout in some well-thrashed streams conduct themselves after the manner of idiots, and forget for the moment that they were ever sent to school and should behave like college graduates. What strange things they do; what crazy, ill-looking devils of flies or baits they take. We think that the fish know nothing, and are quite sure that we are possessed of no skill whatever. We are tempted to adopt the policy of the men who carry a cast of two flies and call themselves fly-fishers. These fishermen make a few casts, and if their flies are not promptly accepted, say, "Trout are not rising, will not take the fly." Out comes a big box of worms, and no more use for flies is found until, maybe, the cast is put up again for a few minutes in the evening. All the trout are reported as taken on the fly.

Fortunately, atheistic doctrines do not hold us for long. We return to the true faith, as the lessons of many years have taught it to us and are happy again. We do not require such delicate creations as the perfect imitations of flies recently worked out by Mr. F. M. Halford, but we have many waters where a high degree of skill is necessary, where the dry-fly is much fished, and where a good copy of the natural will often kill far, far better than any other fly or fancy. If not in numbers, the advantage will be shown in the size of the trout taken. I remember two baskets, one containing thirty-four, the other thirty-six trout. The former weighed twice the number of pounds as compared with the latter, and the difference, it was agreed by both anglers, was caused by one of them following nature, while the other did not. The trout were rising freely, and the smaller ones would take almost any good fly, if not too large.

# THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

## AMERICAN NOTES

F. G. HAVE ANY of the readers of the *Fishing Gazette*  
MAY 14, 1904 had any experience in lake fishing with dry fly? \*  
There is a small lake on the western borders of Sullivan County, in this State, which is alive with large brown trout, but they are extremely hard to circumvent, although often rising freely. There are no minnows in this water, and the fish feed almost entirely on natural flies, larvæ, and caddis. I could not find other food except a large number of lizards. The trout may take the latter, and possibly find shrimp and snails also. These fish are fond of jumping, and it is very trying to see one big trout after another throw itself well above the surface. In the early spring, I hear, there are one or two days when the trout rise at anything, and it is no trick to fill a basket with fish of from 1 lb. to 2½ lb. in weight. After that, however, an angler may go again and again without securing a single specimen. Two years ago two friends of mine mentioned the lake, with the information added that they had hit upon a plan whereby they expected to lay heavy toll on the inhabitants thereof. They said that those trout would just go crazy over the attractions of a few bright minnows, and they had caught a large pailful to be tried the next day. I was invited to join the party, and was glad to do so, as I had nothing better on hand. Well, we took a buckboard early in the morning, and followed a breakneck road to a farm dairy far up among the hills. The last mile was traversed on foot, and presently we saw the little lakelet nestled among the wooded crests, and were soon afloat in a leaky boat of home construction. In a few minutes a fine trout sprang clear of the water, and many more did the same during our stay. The minnows were tried faithfully, but without effect, by trolling and also in still fishing. While the minnow was going on I tried nearly every fly I could think of without getting a rise.



\* [I have found the dry fly very killing on lakes when the fish are rising at flies on the surface—R. B. M.]

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

At last I put up a Bumblepuppy, and with this took one trout of 16 inches. They are elegantly shaped fish, but of rather slim build, and, judging by this one specimen, can make a good fight for their lives. The fish were rising at a very small dun: the body pale bluish brown and almost transparent, and limp wings of nondescript hue. They cruised about a great deal, sucking in every fly they found. The nearest imitation I could find was of no avail; now and then a trout would come to the fly, but always turned away without taking it. I presume that a really first-rate hand with the dry fly would have been able to render a good account of these fish; yet I am inclined to doubt it. The fish were evidently highly educated, and on the perfectly calm water an absolutely exact copy of the natural would be necessary to deceive them. Granted that one had this, the finest gut showed up clearly in the clear water. It would give me much pleasure to be on deck when one of your experts tried these fish. An old friend of mine reported having some sport at the expense of these same trout last year, but would not divulge the secret of his success. Some men there are who say that nothing can be learned from books; in fact, that none except the *dilettante* reads the numerous works published on angling. There may be something in this, but I have not found it true. Anyone can learn to tie flies from Halford and Hall, and there are many, many hints and wrinkles that help to fill the creel, for which we should thank some fishing author.

One instance comes to mind as I write. I had read the Badminton volume, "Salmon and Trout," and I remembered a hint given in the article by H. R. Francis in regard to the Dark Coachman. I was fishing the Neversink in the month of August several years ago, and the water had just got down to fishing order after a heavy freshet. Above what is called the Great Bend is a long but rather shallow pool, with an abrupt bank on the deepest side, and all along this bank the trout seemed to have settled after the recent high water. They were rising constantly at something, but for a long time I could not see what the insect was. At last I went above and crossed over, and then I saw that there was a flight of ants—the winged variety often seen in clouds in late August and September. I did not have an ant in my book, and here is where my reading came in. Mr. Francis says that despite its

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

form, the Dark Coachman will take when ants are on the water, and I found three of these flies, tied on small hooks, in the remains of an old book that I had with me. These were all that were necessary, as by taking things easily, wading quietly, and not casting too frequently in one place, I killed in that pool twenty-eight handsome trout. If I had not read Francis, surely I would never have tried to match an ant with a Dark Coachman.

In Bainbridge's book on angling he says that the feathers of the American bluebird, if to be had, are excellent for the wings of your Iron Blue Dun. Now, in driving home to dinner recently I found a very perfect specimen of this species lying dead by the road. The blue is very blue, but it is hardly iron-blue to my eyes. I must send to "Val Conson" or to our editor for an opinion on the subject. By the way, I miss "Val Conson's" notes on fly-making from the *Fishing Gazette*. Even that accomplished gentleman can hardly have exhausted the subject. I sent him some feathers (wood-duck, etc.) years ago, anonymously, and have written to him once or twice, not mailing the letters, to express my sense of obligation. He has done much for the amateur flytier and for anglers generally. It would surprise him to find that quite a fair sized hook can often be used over here in dry-fly fishing.

## AMERICAN NOTES

F. G.  
AUGUST 20,  
1904

DO TROUT REMEMBER, or rather, have they what we call mind? Do fish that inhabit hard-fished waters breed shy progeny? Is there anything in the doctrine of heredity as applied to trout? I presume that many English chalk-stream fishers would reply in the affirmative, but the angler who follows his sport on rough streams and forest lakes may give a different answer. I have been much interested during the past two years in noticing how many men are using small flies for the salmon and large trout of the Maine lakes. In 1900 a friend wrote me from the Rangeleys that he had had good sport with flies tied on No. 8 hooks, when a larger size was useless. I then sent him a few fancies of my own, dressed on small hooks, and he returned one of them

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showing the scars of battle, which he said had proved very attractive to the salmon, killing the largest fish. It was a plain little fly; tail, a few sprigs of ibis over gold tinsel; peacock herl body, with red-brown hackle and wings, just a scrap of white showing as underwing; sides, small jungle fowl.

Last season very small flies were the fashion, some of the most successful fishermen preferring hooks as small as No. 12 (old style), and the largest trout were taken with small patterns. This size would not be considered small in England and Scotland, but the difference is very great when comparison is made with the flies used when I was in Maine years ago. Then No. 2 was perhaps the most popular size for large fish, and smaller than No. 6 was seldom seen on a cast of flies. In Mr. Henry P. Wells's excellent work, "Fly Rods and Fly Tackle," published in 1885, large hooks are advised. Has the change been made necessary by the increasing shyness and higher education of the trout, or is it the fishermen who have changed their tastes? In 1885 the Parmacheene Belle was (as I think Mr. Wells says) the queen of the Maine lakes. I was offered costly salmon flies in exchange for my inexpensive Belles, and they killed in all conditions of weather and water. It is a very showy fly, and I remember having great sport with it, driving tandem with a scarlet ibis next the wheel, both flies on No. 3 hooks. What a combination to put up for the man who believes in imitating the fly on the water, and whose experience has been confined to streams where there is usually something to imitate! These flies are lures, though I have had a trout of more than a pound in weight rise and suck in the scarlet ibis when it was dabbled on the top of the water.

There came a day, however, when the smallest brook flies distinguished themselves by killing a large basket of trout. The air had been very still for many days; nothing but catpaws had ruffled the smooth surface of the lake; no fish had been taken, but they could be seen rising when the long shadows fell far across the water. In a short evening's fishing I took all the trout I desired with small Duns; the favourite combinations of bright feathers were entirely useless. I was on my way out, and only fished to oblige a woman who was very anxious to carry some trout home with her.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

On a well-stocked trout stream, where there is a good deal of still or slow-flowing water which is not constantly rising and falling, as mountain rivers usually are, the trout soon pick up, or remember, an education, and are not to be taken by the tyro. On the mountain stream they seem to lose a portion of their shyness during every rise of water, particularly if it has been discoloured for a time. Low water makes shy fish, yet the most enjoyable sport to many of us is had on these streams when the water is low and clear.

The habits of trout vary so greatly in different parts of the country that one would have to be an angler of vast experience to speak with authority. We should not become hide-bound or allow our minds to be filled with prejudice because we have been a fly-fisher for many years. Prejudice is the vice of little minds, and we may learn something from nearly everyone we meet. On visiting a stream for the first time avail yourself of the local knowledge of the best native fishermen you can find. From a few post-mortem examinations of the stomachs of trout much can be learned.

The first and second editions of Ronald's "Fly Fishers' Entomology" give the best coloured illustrations of natural flies I have seen, though published so many years ago. The plates in the modern edition are worthless. An old Yorkshire angler, named Michael Theakstone, wrote a curious and interesting book on the water flies, which was illustrated by his daughter and edited by Mr. F. M. Walbran, of Leeds. He adopted a system of classification and nomenclature entirely his own. It is a common-sense system, too, and is in many respects more reasonable than the one to which we are accustomed. However, it will never be generally adopted, and many of Theakstone's descriptions are vague and hard to follow. The best of artificial flies are by no means perfect, but I believe that if colour and size are attended to the trick can be turned. Of course, when the trout are feeding steadily upon minute insects, invisible perhaps on the surface of the stream, they are almost beyond our wiles. Still they are worth trying for, and a midge or a special pattern may give us a few fish.

The first desideratum is to find time to go fishing. There is the rub

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

in the case of most of us. We are so tied down to the pursuit of the essential dollar that we lose the best and most innocent pleasures that this old earth affords. Time flies so fast after youth is past that we cannot accomplish one-half the many things we have in mind, or indeed one-half our duties. The only safe and sensible plan is to make other things give way to the essentials, and the first of these is fly-fishing. There are few men so wise as Henry Thoreau. I do not think that he was a great angler, but he made time for the life which he desired to live and considered best for his own peculiar genius. If we were satisfied to live in a \$28.00 house and rest contented with the simple fare which was all that Thoreau found necessary to preserve his health and strength, we would be able to fish as often as we have a mind to.

I must confess that I am not fond of fishing in preserved water; yet the day is fast approaching when no one will be able to cast a line in any of the streams of the middle States without joining a club or making payment in some way. Posting (against trespassers) is becoming almost universal, and long stretches of our best rivers are being bought up every year. This is usually done by purchasing a few yards of land upon both banks. Sometimes the property is simply leased for a period of years. Many of the streams now closed were stocked at the public expense from State hatcheries, and at one time it was quite generally believed that such would remain free. This proves not to have been the case, I believe. The development is a natural one of the times we live in, I presume; yet I confess that I do not like it. If all waters had remained free, perhaps they would not have endured successfully the onslaughts of the fast-growing army of anglers. I know not.





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## AMERICAN NOTES

F. G.  
APRIL 8, 1905      WE ARE ALWAYS interested over here in anything that our English cousins have to say about us or our methods. I was, therefore, quite pleased to find "Val Conson's" reflections on the subject of American trout flies in your issue of Dec. 17. Subsequently some further criticism has appeared by other writers.

I fancy that these angling friends of the "Fast Anchored Isles" scarcely realise how varied are the methods required to ensure successful results in fly fishing in various portions of the vast territory embraced in the United States and Canada. The habits of the trout, character of the streams and lakes, insect life, etc., are so entirely different that a large experience in one locality may be of exceedingly little value in another. The works mentioned by "Val Conson" were published a number of years ago—not very long, perhaps, after the later editions of Francis Francis's "Book on Angling," an acknowledged authority in England at that time. The sizes of hooks recommended by Francis for general work in the South of England run from eight to sixteen of the old scale. He dresses an Iron Blue Dun on a No. 12 during the intermissions in a great hatch of those insects. In fact, he advocates the sizes which were in general use in the Middle States forty years ago, and probably would be in use to-day in both England and America if it had not been for the great spread of dry-fly fishing. This high art method may have become a necessity owing to the constantly increasing education of the trout in well-fished waters, just as it appears to be doing on this side of the ocean. Here, however, it will probably be confined to localities where there is a certain quantity of fly on the water, and where considerable fishing is done. I remember travelling three hundred miles on one occasion to fish a stream that was highly recommended to me. It was a tributary of the Susquehanna River, and at that time flowed through a hemlock forest. My disappointment may be imagined when I learned that, though there were many trout, fly-fishing was practically useless until the month of July. There was no rise of naturals of any kind until then. This is an unusual instance, and like conditions are not often found

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

except in a few wilderness streams. There we must use the artificial fly as a lure. My own success in Maine many years ago was with the Parmacheene Belle and Scarlet Ibis, dressed on No. 2 hooks. It seemed absurd to use such hummingbirds to catch trout. We can only fish fine when we have small insects to imitate, and there are many waters in the States where the skill of the experienced dry-fly angler is not thrown away. Many years since Mr. Marston sent me a quantity of Holland's floating flies, and I afterwards purchased some dozens direct from Mr. Holland. For some time I had little use for them; then they came into play on some well-fished streams, and patterns were eagerly begged of me. Floating flies can now be bought in New York in almost any reasonable quantity, with casting lines of the finest gut (excepting gossamer). In "The Game Fish of the North" and "Superior Fishing," written by Robert Barnwell Roosevelt in 1863 and 1865, we find something in regard to natural flies and imitating them. We also find the dressings of all of Ronald's patterns, given for this country, with the feathers of American birds. I think that these are the first books which indicate any study of the natural by an American angler. No one can regret more than I do the absence of a standard work on the natural flies of American waters. A few papers have been written on the subject, but more attention seems to have been paid to the inhabitants of puddles and stagnant ponds by our naturalists than to the beautiful ephemera. The work required of the author of such a book would be great, for we have many more insects than the equivalents of your English species. The author "Barnwell" first called attention to the size of American flies, and to the fact that many were not only larger but brighter in colour. To some extent I think that size follows the water. I have found more large ephemera, for instance, on a big stream than on small ones. "Val Conson" would be delighted with some of the insects found here. What would he think of a blue dun, slightly yellow or tinged with green, nearly as large as your March brown? He would find some extraordinary winged creatures, the horned corydalis, for instance. May and June are the best months for noting the insect life of our trout rivers, as, after the water is warmed by the summer sun, there is scarcely any hatch at all. Of course, one can go to the head waters where the stream

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

remains cool, but the flies will only appear in the evening and will be mostly of small size.

We are quite ready to admit that chalk-stream fishing with dry fly for shy, well-fed trout is the most scientific of angling, but in the United States we find every variety of sport with the fly rod, even to dry fly on slow streams with very small flies. The size of the fish on these last would not, however, average up with those in a well-preserved water in the South of England. We have the brown, rainbow, and native brook trout (I will never call the latter a char if I can help it) in the cast nowadays. The first-named sometimes attain to the size of monsters, and we like to have a try for one of these when we come to a great pool. We can only hope to tempt him probably with the lure fly, and are only too happy if he will take it. We must have a large assortment of sizes and shades, unless we are men of one stream; then, indeed, we can manage with a very few flies selected from an abundant experience. I seldom fail to carry a small tin box containing half a gross of the best dry flies, but hereafter I shall buy few ooo. If the fish will take a 10 old style, 5 new, fished dry, so much the better—it is not too large for an imitation of many of the early flies. I fear that in a few years we will have no free fishing of the sort I prefer, at least within a reasonable distance of our large cities. In the old days one could wander from stream to stream, rod in hand, but this state of affairs could not continue in a country advancing so rapidly in wealth and population.

When I have time I intend to revisit several streams of a peculiar character which I knew well many years ago. I fancy that these, with possibly the Castalia, near Sandusky, Ohio, have many features in common with your chalk rivers. They are formed by great springs which gush out of the limestone rock, and are always clear and cold. Flowing through valleys miles in width, their descent is not rapid; many old mills exist on them, and the stretches of quick, shallow water are short. Some years ago I heard that one of these had been stocked with rainbow trout, but formerly they held only natives. If brown trout were introduced, in a very short time there would be many fish of large size, and first-rate dry-fly fishing would be had. The difficulty is that when they reach 2 lb. or so they quit surface feeding to a great extent.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

The number of men who use the dry fly, more or less, is increasing every year, and many would probably be ready to join a club which could promise first-rate dry-fly water and big fish.

The natives formerly ran from one-quarter to three-quarters of a pound, with occasionally a much larger trout. I believe that the size decreased owing to poaching or some illegal practices. There is much insect life in such spring waters, and they carry an enormous head of fish with anything like fair treatment.

The rings made by rising fish seemed to dimple the water as far as one could see in the spring months, and during the evening rise every foot of water seemed to have its rising trout.

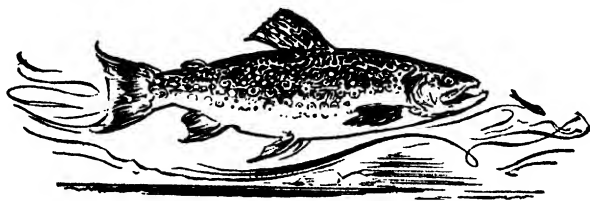
Just think of it! Chalk stream fishing in America! Even long ago special flies of smaller size were made for one or two of these streams, and the colour of the natural in the water was of the first importance. There was just about enough current in the dams, and not many places in the shallows where there was too much.

In England you have a long season and apparently good rises of fly even in the hottest weather. One thing is certain—there can be no good rise of naturals unless the water is cool.

Your summers are shorter than ours (speaking now of the latitude of New York City), and probably your hot spells are short lived.

We have a nice assortment of weather to offer, and have just come through a really first-rate blizzard. Nothing has occurred thus far to injure the prospects for trout fishing. I heard that many fish were seen on the spawning beds in November. The danger comes when the ice breaks up with the streams in flood.

I must bring these rambling notes to a conclusion, as already they are much too long, besides having for their subject nothing in particular.—West Haverstraw, N. Y.



# THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

## AMERICAN NOTES

F. G.  
DECEMBER 23,  
1905

TROUT HAVE BEEN hard at work on the spawning beds for several weeks, but I have seen none of the very large brown trout known to inhabit this stream. A kingfisher has been playing the deuce with the smaller fish, and it was only on Dec. 7 that I was able to put a stop to its ravages with a charge of shot. All its companions had flown southward long ago, but this bird had been observed almost daily since Oct. 2. It was extremely wild and cunning. Kingfishers were very numerous this summer, and must have done great damage during the long drought. The crest feathers of this bird make good legs for the American Grannom, being usually of a dark dun colour. The last kingfisher killed had a black head.

Our Grannom is about the colour of a dark-blue coot feather, and sometimes comes on in great swarms on warm evenings in June. At least that is the season for them at an elevation of about 1500 feet. At a lower level they may hatch out two or three weeks earlier.

It is difficult to find feathers suitable for the wings of Pale Duns in this country. We have no bird like your starling, which furnishes a great variety of shades at different ages. The robin, a red-breasted thrush, has fine dark wing feathers, but is protected at all seasons.

I have been on the look-out for a bird which will supply fine Pale Dun feathers for years, but so far have found nothing that satisfied me. Our flies for fine work are usually larger than the dry flies I imported some years ago. I still have a box full of patterns that did not take well.

At one time I was quite insane on the subject of dry-fly fishing, and worked very hard to little purpose. I remember well my first attempt. Many trout were rising at some microscopic flies in an eddy at the head of a pool. A swift current ran between myself and the rising fish, and I began with a casting line of Holland's gossamer gut and a Dun of some sort on a 00 hook. The flies cocked all right, but the instant they lit on the water the line was seized by the current, and they were dragged rapidly down stream. As the line sank, the fly

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

had to take a long dive before another cast could be made, and was soon well soaked. I laboured away until perspiration streamed down my face, got ten rises, and caught one 1¼-lb. trout. I was using a 10-ft. 10-oz. rod of English make.

Why is it that so few makers of split bamboo rods use the steely kind of cane? All the bamboo imported appears to be of the same variety, but there is an extraordinary difference in quality. Yet there are manufacturers who seem to have no difficulty in procuring an unlimited supply of the steel-like, snappy kind. I fancy that it may be in the seasoning. For instance, I had a new tip (top) made for a very fine old rod. It seemed all right, but was much heavier than the old tip, and would not work well with the old butt and middle. It was too heavy for them. One of our manufacturers sells nothing but the highest class of rod at top prices, yet seems to be able to turn out any numbers of rods required by his enormous trade. There must be some method of seasoning or preparing the cane to secure such uniform results in the tournament class of rods which is now largely used in ordinary stream fishing. When I treat myself to a new rod of this description, I propose to have a good-sized shaped handle of cork, even if it adds somewhat to the apparent weight. I dislike the extremely small grip so much used at present.

Shooting in this part of the country is hard work and grouse so wild that one must be satisfied with small results. An English sportsman would probably find it poor fun after the heavily-stocked preserves to which he is accustomed. Our ruffed grouse is one of the few birds that can fly at express speed through the thickest covers. Our woodcock is smaller than the European variety, but a fine bird for all that. In size and weight they vary greatly. The female is the larger bird of a pair.

In spite of very cold weather, with ice and snow, I have noted many moths hatching in the woods. One cold afternoon, when fine flakes of snow were being driven before a gale of wind from the north-

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

west, many of these insects were fluttering about in the woods. They were quite large, and dirty yellow in colour.

I have been disappointed in the number of ephemera and other insects on the water in September and October. I expected to find most of the species observed in May and June, but this year they were few indeed. Consequently not many trout were rising, and I saw none of the big fellows. A few years ago, on my last visit, these big trout were often visible in the shallow water at the tails of the big pools. Sometimes they were so tame that one could sit down and study their movements at leisure.

I do not sympathise with the people who are prejudiced against the brown trout. The presence of really large fish in any water adds greatly to the interest of fishing, and personally I would rather take one big trout than a basketful of medium size.

Extreme low water during the summer months is responsible for the destruction of large numbers of the best fish. Many people cannot resist temptation when they see big trout in positions where they can be easily taken by unfair and unlawful means. I was very sorry, however, for a little boy who killed a  $4\frac{3}{4}$ -lb. trout on a shallow with a stick. The fish was forcing his way over a ripple, or riffle, as it is sometimes called, and the child, only six years old, attacked it of course. He was a proud boy, indeed, when he carried the big fish to his father, and the latter was proud of his boy, making no secret of the deed. In fact, he nailed the head of the trout where everyone could see it, and a game warden or inspector, passing by, inquired into the matter. The result was that a fine of twenty-five dollars was imposed and paid—quite a large sum in the rural districts, and too large an amount to lose anywhere.

I saw six fine trout at work on a small rift in a side stream. There were two fish of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  lb. to 2 lb. each, and four of about  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. The back fins of the larger fish were out of water, and the whole party crowded into a small space. These little spring brooks are called "bennie-kills" in this part of the country. "Kill" appears to have been the old Dutch term for streams of considerable size, and "benne" or "bennie" must be a diminutive term applied to tributaries too short to merit a distinctive name. They afford excellent facilities for spawning, and the

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

large fish are not obliged to go far from the main river in order to find excellent locations for their redds.

The season for deer shooting in this country is limited to the first fifteen days in November. Dogs are not allowed, and as not enough snow has fallen for tracking; yet hunting has not been pursued with much success. The country is rough and mountainous, and in the forests a man hunting alone, with a thick carpet of dry leaves under foot, has small chance of seeing a deer, much less a shot at one.

It is rather dreary in the country at this season. The birds have gone for the most part, the hum and buzz of insect life has ceased, the leaves, which were recently so beautiful, are on the ground, brown and withered. On a still day Nature seems to be dead, or at least in a comatose state. Even the light of day is hard and cold. As I write, the wind is shrieking and tearing at this frail wooden house as if determined to carry it off bodily.

The houses here are not adapted to the winter climate. Many of the rooms are closed and the family occupy only a few which can be kept fairly warm. In fact the kitchen is apt to be the sitting-room, as, if small, it is usually warm, not to say red-hot. Notwithstanding the cold snap, moths were hatching out in the woods on Nov. 16. Saw two robins after a snowstorm on the ninth.

I have seen very large quills used on English flies. They were ribbed, but were certainly much larger and heavier than peacock quill. I have collected many of these, hoping to find some large enough for the flies I wished to tie. No one sells fly material in this country, and many useful or necessary articles can only be got by importation from abroad. Even if this is done, the American amateur is frequently disappointed, as it is difficult to describe just what is required. I wonder where you find all your condors and adjutants. Yet the former is a South American bird. I fancy that albatross quills would be excellent for floating flies, for the feathers of this bird are full of oil. Unfortunately, I lost the only feather of this kind I ever had. Last August I saw the first white spinners I have ever found on our streams. There was just a little red or rosy colour in the body, a beautiful ephemeron,



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

and not very small, certainly twice the size of your Jenny Spinner. Thankful am I that we have small occasion for the use of 000 hooks.

The streams were almost dry during the last of the summer months. Being something of an invalid at the time, I did not go very far afield, and fished only in the evening. When I saw a good trout, or heard of one inhabiting a particular pool, I went after it again and again. One fish resisted all my wiles for two weeks after I discovered it, when rising at natural flies. These so-called "big fish" were from thirteen inches to seventeen inches long, all brown or yellow trout, but were not so heavy by some ounces as your chalk stream trout. We have in this country a few limestone streams, which are slow flowing and filled with moss. This contains great quantities of trout food, and a sixteen-inch native will weigh 2 lb. plump in June. One frequently hears of heavy weight for length, but these trout are usually weighed in the mind of the captor and shrink horribly if placed in the scales.

## AMERICAN NOTES

F. G.  
MARCH 17,  
1906

I AM TOLD that the blue Andalusian is very common in many parts of England, and is popular among farmers. Such is not the case in the United States, and one seldom sees a blue fowl. Occasionally a few pens of Andalusians are exhibited at poultry shows. All the cocks I have seen have had black hackles, and were quite useless from the flytier's point of view. All the dun hackles that I have collected have been from sports, fowls of mixed breeds, and the last blue cock of which I have knowledge died this winter. Does anyone know how to cross breed chickens so that blue or dun hackles will result? I have bought such hackles in England, but many proved to be hen hackles, and most of the cocks were poor in quality.

We had a fine open winter until January; the lowest temperature registered in December was zero. The old saying that as the days lengthen the cold strengthens has proved true this year, and we have had some severe winter weather in this region (Sullivan County,

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

N. Y.). Ten to sixteen degrees below zero, deep snow, and tempestuous gales of icy wind. This is the first winter I have spent far from the madding crowd, in the real country, far from railroads and towns, and I admit that there has been considerable discomfort as well as pleasure. It is difficult to perform one's ablutions in solid ice, and getting out of bed in the morning is a decidedly shivery affair. Years ago I asked a man who lived in this vicinity what he did in winter (he had no property), and he replied that he sat by the stove all day and put on wood. At times it has been difficult to do much more than this. Fly-making was poor fun. I made wax of many degrees of hardness. If too hard, it was useless. If soft, it would not bind. I used resin, beeswax, white wax, and turpentine, in varying proportions, and tried "Athenian's" liquid wax (turpentine and resin in equal parts). Is there such a thing as a perfect wax, good in any climate? I was anxious to work, as two years ago I promised to tie a quantity of flies for friends, but had not had time to do so. Also, I was entirely out myself, and had to buy flies for my one outing on the stream last spring.

Some of the new patterns of flies are nothing but millinery goods, and have nothing to commend them. Many people do not seem to be aware that the ground has been thoroughly tilled for the best part of a century by real artists in fly-making, who lived on or near well-known rivers, and had a lifetime to test the effects of colour and combinations of colour in the water, in the case of salmon flies and lake flies. When we come to imitations of natural flies for trout fishing, there is abundant room for study and improvement, as our artificials are far from perfect; but the continual addition of newly named fancy flies to our lists is rather a nuisance, as too often they possess neither real novelty nor value.

The deep woods are very desolate at this season; only an inspection of the snow shows that many small animals are busy during the hours of night or early morning. The common American rabbit is said to be a true hare, yet it spends much of its time in burrows under ground, and few will be found sitting out in their forms after cold

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

weather begins. The big hare that turns white in winter sits out in all weathers, but seems to retire to the evergreen swamps during the day. This fellow can cover ground like a racehorse, when scared or pursued, and hops about four feet when taking things easy. Snow birds are about as usual and a few jays. A flock of English sparrows has been wintering about the house and barns, and seems to be as hearty and happy as possible, even in the worst weather. The water of the Never-sink is wonderfully clear and sunny usually, but now it runs almost black, where it can be seen between ice and snow. The *farios* in this river are of both the brown and yellow varieties, and individuals never seem to alter their colours. I have watched the same fish for many weeks and they did not change, although subjected to exactly the same influences of water, light, and shade, in the same small pools.

The yellow trout are real beauties. The vivid spots, golden belly, and general brightness of coloration can hardly be surpassed by any other fish. I remember my delight and surprise over the first one I ever saw. It was in the summer of 1880, and I had gone down to the stream with a little four-ounce switch, made of lancewood, to take a few trout for supper. I did not know that there were any but native trout in the river, and was fishing with a single fly, a tiny Alder. I had killed four natives, when there was a quiet rise and I was fast in a better fish which gave smart play on my light tackle. I had left my net and had to strand the trout. It was one of the yellow boys and a most perfect specimen. I could not imagine what it was, and supposed that I had taken some rare fish or sport from the native trout. I was determined to preserve it if possible, and putting it in my big soft hat I broke for a little candy store attached to the hotel, without even taking the fly from its mouth. The storekeeper had a box in a race near his place, and if he would put the trout in this it might be saved. I was not in good condition, and by the time I reached the store I was badly blown. The man looked at my crimson face anxiously as I tried to ask him for a large bucket of water, and a party of ladies viewed me with astonished curiosity. One of them kindly put in her oar and said, "Oh! I know what he wants; he is trying to order a bottle of wine." Finally, the poor fish was deposited in the live-bait box, but it only lived a day or two.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

I learned that a few brown trout fry had been placed in the river in 1885 and 1886. This stocking was continued after 1890, and by 1894 there were a number of big *farios* in every large pool. They were all fish of from 1 lb. to 6 lb. in weight. Very few small trout of this species were caught until after the last date-named; the bulk of the fish were still natives. Nowadays, and for some years past, the brown trout have been largely in the majority. The same thing is seen on every hand. Sometimes it only requires about three years to replace the *fontinalis* with *fario*. Lots of men work themselves into a rage at this, and yearn for the old days of native trout only; but I notice that stocking with brown trout fry continues when any stocking is done. I tell them, if you want natives you must stock with natives, but when the foreign trout is once established and there are many large fish, they may maintain the upper hand. They grow faster and must be heavier feeders than either the native or rainbow. It puzzles me why the last-named trout should have been successfully introduced into but one stream of which I have personal knowledge. In this they were very numerous for many years, but are now yielding place to the *farios*. It is a pity that stocking with rainbows was not continued instead of introducing the browns in this river. They gave great sport, although rarely going over 3 lb. in weight.

Do you ever dress spinners with plain summer duck wings? I fancy they would answer well for your Red or Brown Spinner. Of course, the feather is not so easy to get as formerly. Summer duck once bred in many of the northern states. They used to do so too on this river, and are yet found on some of the lakes in this county. I shot a fine drake out of a flock of eight birds, several years ago near one of them, and saw several others. Quite a nice blue quill can be torn from a coot's feather. It is bright and shiny. Some guinea-fowls furnish blue hackles that will answer our purpose if we can get nothing better. They are short and long in fibre, so that two may be used. I found an albatross feather that I have had for years and had lost sight of, but the oil has all dried out, and the quills or fibres are weak. Some are dun coloured, but I fear will do no good. There are wools that do not absorb moisture readily. A favourite fly of mine has a body of

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

this material, yet floats well. One of my friends says that it floats like a haystack. He is a very successful angler, using the dry fly often on waters where nothing except wet fly has ever been known. Many furs are too dark when wet. Our muskrat is very nice to work with, but is dark blue in colour—iron blue. Mink fur makes a nice brown body, and with dun wings and red hackle and tail an excellent fly. A good angler I know likes a body of red cow's hair, heavily hackled down the body. It is a tremendously hairy, bushy fly, yet kills well here in spring.

The Scotch flies with little wing and less body and hackle are not favoured by many, yet some men say they prefer lightly dressed flies, and sometimes reduce wings and hackle with a penknife. This is easily done, but spoils the "looks" of the fly. The south of England flies often do well if not too small. I dress many flies with two hackles to avoid long legs, yet it seems strange that the trout do not take exception to this vast quantity of legs. For one thing, the excessive hackle has the effect of a halo about the body of the fly, and a fly buzzing upon the water has the same appearance.

I am afraid that the intense dry cold has injured my rods. The wrappings are snapping, and I am sure that they are dry as old bones. If a man's lungs are in a bad state after pneumonia or any lung disease, let him hie away to mountain trout stream country where the air is dry and bracing. Let him fish and shoot just as much as his strength will permit. For a time it may be very hard work. He has no breath to go on, and puffs and blows with every little exertion, but gradually the cool, pure atmosphere will strengthen him, the lungs will clear and heal, and in time be as good as new. One can live cheaply in the country, and can soon become accustomed to the lack of some of the comforts and luxuries of life. Strong men are sometimes alarmed by continued weakness or the loss of a little blood, and are afraid to exert themselves in any way. It is little use to sit about, drive a little only, and possibly eat well enough. Every organ and muscle must be strengthened, and as soon as one begins to put on real hard flesh he is safe enough. It may take time, but anything is better than being a chronic invalid. I am surely off the track again.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

Years ago I made quite a collection of standard salmon flies. My idea was to get a dozen or more from each celebrated tier known to anglers, and then, perhaps, have them mounted in a big frame in groups with name below or above. I think that this would be very interesting, but I never got very far, not beyond 180 in all, and I kept giving them away as patterns or to friends going north, and now have but a few dozen remaining. Forrest, of Kelso, certainly turns out beautiful work, and was formerly the only well-known maker in this country. Wright, of Sprouston, is an artist also, but I wanted all the Irishmen whose names are so familiar. Hardy and Cummings, in England, Wm. Brown, and many others too numerous to mention, sell beautiful flies, but what I really wanted was flies tied by the fingers of a man who was known far and wide for his fine work. Dan O'Fee, I presume, is one of this description. I am afraid that the salmon fly scarcely holds the position among anglers that it had when Francis wrote his work on angling. He tried as far as possible to give special flies for every river in the United Kingdom, but now the general opinion is that a half-dozen well selected standard flies—large, small, and medium—are all that is required on any river. In looking over a journal kept by a good angler many years ago I found here and there various flies stuck into the leaves with a few lines devoted to some unusual incident. One was a tiny Silver Doctor with a single scale on the barb. It was no larger than a small trout fly, but had held a foul-hooked 30-lb. salmon. These small flies were used far up the rivers late in the season when the fish had been up some time and were hard to move. Do you think that salmon take these tiny objects for anything except flies? This angler believed that all flies were taken because they filled the fish with rage. The salmon came at the fly to smash and kill it, not to eat it, always as something *alive* and to be killed. We are on firmer ground with trout, but their oddities and queer pranks are innumerable. All that we can say after much experience is that we know pretty well the habits and tastes of the trout in a few streams that we have fished for many years.



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

### ANGLERS SHOULD KEEP A DIARY

All anglers should keep a diary, but few will take time when they are tired to write the few lines necessary. The one just referred to was not large, but it had plenty of meat in it. Small outlines of the pools were drawn, and diminutive salmon showed the lies of the fish in a number of the New Brunswick and Canadian rivers, the killing flies, stage of water and state of weather, and all incidents of importance. Some of these rivers were comparatively unknown at that time, and I think that with that small book in his pocket a stranger could have visited any one of them, and made the best of his opportunities. Then much pleasure is to be derived from going through such records in after years. Without such a diary much will have passed from memory. Curiously enough, I was glancing over an old book on fishing by Forrester, when I noticed a record of the taking of a 15-lb. 3-oz. pike in the Upper Hudson with a large artificial fly. I am tempted to mail the book. Everyone who has seen these flies at work has faith, but no one else will even give them a fair trial. Yet it would be found a great convenience to have when you see the minnows jumping from a big pike and have only small flies or coarse fish tackle. The big fly can be put on in a moment. It can be got out, although not too easy to cast with a very light rod. But the sport! I took a good pike with fly tackle, and one will get some new ideas as to the fighting abilities of a pike.

We are not much troubled with pike in our trout streams, but pickerel have destroyed the trout fishing in many lakes. Preserves have been ruined by malicious individuals secretly introducing pickerel. The black bass is the only fish that is too savage for pike. Placed in a small lake alive with pickerel, they soon kill off all the small ones, and thereafter the stock of long noses will be extremely small. The big mouth bass of the south rises very freely at the fly, but the small mouth not always or everywhere. When he does, the sport is excellent, but with the big mouth there is usually but one good run. However, the latter attains a great size in some waters, and has a record of 24 lb. in Florida. Three of us once saw a hooked fish jump that we estimated to weigh more than this. It was in almost virgin waters.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

In making quill-bodied flies it is a good plan to varnish the foundation before winding on the quill. I have no condor or adjutant feathers, and peacock quills are very weak.

The waters of the Neversink, usually so bright and sparkling, are dark and sullen looking in their frame of ice and snow, but the good time is coming. Some morning we will awake to find the south wind blowing, and the air will be sweet and soft. It is very wintry here at present, but with the advent of March we begin to feel that the season of our discontent is nearly over.

The trout season will open on April 16. The weather is apt to be cold and windy at that time, and the rivers are often in flood, but in a few short weeks we can look forward to the realisation of every good thing promised by the birth of spring. The good time is coming, and progress is the word for several months to come.

I am pleased to see that your great rod makers (Messrs. Hardy Bros.) have adopted a satisfactory method of illustrating salmon flies. I think that the result is arrived at by combining photography and lithography, and the same process has been used considerably in this country. The plates are real reproductions of the actual flies, in colours. Sometimes mistakes in coloration are made, as may be seen in the enclosed plate of common heavily dressed trout flies from a small cheap catalogue. Usually one can distinguish each feather and fibre; the colouring is true to the originals, and such illustrations are almost as useful to the angler and fly-makers as the actual flies would be, besides being infinitely more convenient. Engraving and hand-colouring are expensive, and the latter is frequently incorrect. Very few of the plates in modern works equal those found in Ronald's old "Fly Fishers' Entomology." We are already making photographs in several colours, but until this art is perfected the photo-lithograph method can be used with satisfactory results.





## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

The *Fishing Gazette* says that two English manufacturers have succeeded in making light rods equal in every respect to "Leonards," so, of course, it must be true. Here, then, is the end of the whole matter. The long and bitter rod controversy is at an end, and all parties should be satisfied. The favourite style of rod in any country or region should be developed by the conditions surrounding the sport until something very near perfection has been arrived at, but individual fads and fancies may retard or influence this development considerably. Personally, I do not consider weight on the scales of great importance in choosing a rod. Of course, it is pleasant to be able to say, "I killed a ten-pound salmon on my five-ounce rod," but that same rod might have been far more agreeable to fish with if it had a bigger handle, and weighed an ounce or two more. It is the weight outboard, the leverage against you, that paralyses the grasping hand. I have said this before, however.

I have a great desire to test the "Houghton" type of dry-fly rod, but the duty added to first cost would make this an expensive purchase. Unless this rod is very top-heavy, I fancy that I could use it without great fatigue. I have fished many days with a ten-ounce rod having a good big comfortable cork handle. Large numbers of very light rods were sold in this country last season, and they are pretty things to fish with, but they are best for a man who can afford to own several fine rods.

Some years ago there was a great number of big brown trout in the Neversink, and for a short time during the early part of the season they rose freely. Now these old fellows are very tricky. There are lots of rocks and some waterlogged trees in the pools, and the number of fine fish lost by good anglers was appalling. I do not say that more would have been landed with heavier rods and tackle, but I think so. It is very different in a boat or canoe with an experienced guide at the oars or paddle to do half the work and back up the rod. No one ever dreams of small fish or remembers them when caught, but a very big trout is the subject of happy recollections and self-congratulation for many years.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

Our ephemera seem to hatch out very quickly on the surface of the stream. I can never follow the transformation from nymph to sub-imago even with big flies. There is one which may be a species of mayfly, with yellow body and light-coloured wings, and I have stood or knelt on a rock immediately above where they were coming up. It seemed as if the big wings came right out of the water. The trout take these flies freely, but I have never seen what could be called a big hatch. Some flies are seen every year at about the same season, others appear in great numbers one year and sparsely or not at all another. This puzzles me greatly. Also, why there were no naturals worth mentioning on this river last autumn.

Why does the species of large stonefly common on these streams hatch all the season, yet never in great numbers? I have seen it rising in the air on a pitch-black night, by carrying a lantern.

By the way, that is good fun. You can have a most interesting time of it by going on the water with a good strong lantern with reflector. It can be turned down low, and then the light may be thrown suddenly in the direction of any sound one may hear. You will see the night life of the river—animals nocturnal in their habits, and a host of flies that never appear by day.

On my last trip several persons had a narrow escape from a very horrible experience. The night was very dark, but one could see a little when on a road. I was crossing an open bridge, when a man, woman, and three small children—one an infant in arms—entered from the other end. When we were only a few yards apart, I saw a skunk in the middle of the bridge between us. The animal, in its usual poky, indifferent way, was walking slowly towards the other party. Fortunately, these people did not notice it—no sound was made, and the skunk passed within a yard of the little party. If it had been interfered with or alarmed in regard to its own safety, the consequences might have been unpleasant, to say the least. I shudder when I think of the condition those children would have been in. Nothing known to me will eradicate the bouquet of mephitis. This creature is the favourite fur-bearing animal of young trappers. It is

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easily taken, and the dry skin is good for so much cash in hand, being worth fifty cents to one dollar and fifty cents in the nearest country town.

No one has been able to trap or shoot the albino fox, whose habitat is near this place, although many persons have been in pursuit of it. Reynard is very expert in taking care of his hide. They do little damage here, as their diet to a great extent is made up of field mice. Any man can satisfy himself in regard to this by performing a few *post mortems*—nothing except the remains of mice will usually be found in the stomach.

The saying of "Athenian" that the difficulties of fly-making have been greatly exaggerated, both within and without the ranks of the professional, is very true. For years I have used a vise, and was fully convinced that my clumsy fingers could not do the work alone. However, during the bitterly cold weather I could not work at a table near a window without freezing, and I could not read all the time, so was driven to try finger work as I sat almost on top of the wood-burning stove. Much to my surprise, I had little trouble, and was able to turn out fairly decent flies down to those on o size of hook.

I tried the Russian vise, invented by Baron T., but my thumb was not long enough to reach the hook for putting on wings. The point is, I found that even a very small hook could be held quite securely with finger and thumb of left hand.

The Hawksley vise must be a great convenience and a real comfort in fly dressing. Wax is the great difficulty in cold weather. If made soft enough it does not bind well, or soon becomes greasy.

Part of the albatross feather makes a very pretty blue dun body. It can be worked so as to rib nicely. Ostrich is strong, but makes a smooth body without a rib.

The wings of our grouse and woodcock are not very good for flies, but these birds, particularly the woodcock, furnish very pretty mottled feathers for hackles. Before the wild pigeon became extinct its wing feathers were used for flies. The dove feathers are a nice colour, but

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the texture is not satisfactory. The moose bird of the Far North affords beautifully fine wings, rather dark in colour. There may be good feathers on the butcher bird. Some of the smaller herons are useful, and mud-hens or dapper rails are first rate. Upon the whole, there is no bird so useful as your starling, which supplies many shades and has remarkably large, or wide, wing feathers for such a small bird. One of your old writers—Bainbridge, I think—talked about the American bluebird for iron blues. I cannot see it after examining a specimen. I may be wrong, but it is a very small bird. The great majority of our insectivorous birds are protected at all seasons. The lower portion of the golden-winged fluke's wing feathers is a fine yellow. A pretty little yellow fly has been made by combining this feather with the old field-lark's breast. The lark's wing is very fine and of peculiar shades. I am always on the lookout. There must be something really excellent to be found. I wish to tie flies to-day, but it is quite out of the question with zero weather, and a gale of wind blowing straight from the Arctic regions. By the way, our kingfishers afford some useful hackles. The crest feathers are very small, but the colour is excellent. The big brown curlew would make lovely wings for Sedges and Welshman's Button. Snipe, called English snipe here, are pretty good, but too small for any but very little flies. There is a whole host of plovers, snipe, and bay birds, all of which can be used.

One can tie many flies so that they can be used wet or dry. If the wings are well set up, the fly will cock very well without splitting them.



Fishing big streams in early spring when the water is high, it is absolutely essential to fish down for good results. One has to hang the fly over the fish sometimes. This is like salmon fishing in miniature, and one may have to follow his fish for some distance down stream, through water and over rocks in anything but easy fashion.

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I have heard men say that the brown trout do not leap. This is a mistake. I have had nearly every fish jump throughout the day when the water was cold. After the summer sun has warmed the water they are not so active, and one frequently hooks the lazy old duffers that will not do anything except bore slowly away from the rod. Such fish are often dangerous to handle. They do not tire, and may suddenly wake up at the last moment. I remember one old fellow who beat me twice by doing nothing at all. The conditions necessitated small flies and fine gut, and after taking the fly he went down and stayed there. The second time he did not move more than a yard or so, and remained in plain sight—a long, heavy, almost black body. He accepted the fly gingerly, and was not really well hooked in either instance.

These black-brown trout are very ugly, and do not in the least resemble the lovely yellow-bellied boys and girls of the same species. One of the most beautiful fish taken out of this river was a yellow lady trout of five and a half-pounds. I fear that there are few of these big fish now in the stream. The droughts in summer are largely responsible for the destruction of these trout. In several rivers they should grow as large as the same species does in New Zealand. The conditions must be much the same—big water and an endless supply of food.

The largest for this river was, I believe, nine and a half pounds. This was taken by a boy some years ago. Many were killed up to five pounds.

A few small salmon were killed in the Upper Delaware and some hundreds in the Hudson as the direct result of stocking by the States of Pennsylvania and New York. The former river is too far south probably—that is, the estuary is—but salmon would probably have established themselves in the Hudson if there had been no high dams or obstructions.

It is a curious fact that for some years a large colony of the great blue heron, or crane, was allowed to nest and increase on the Never-sink. The destruction of trout must have been enormous. The stink

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of rotten fish tainted the air for a long distance. There are a few remaining. I got a long shot at one last fall. I once crawled up on four fully grown young ones that were fishing in the tail of a big pool. It was an interesting sight, as I was quite close. They were absolutely motionless most of the time. Suddenly there would be a quick dart, and a small fish would be taken, but only minnows and small suckers (carp), as far as I could judge. The plumage varies from light blue-grey to dark iron-blue. I have used the herls a good deal for bodies of small Duns. It is best to strengthen them with a ribbing of some sort.



### LETTERS FROM A RECLUSE

F. S.  
APRIL 28, 1906

IT IS a bitter cold winter's night and I am far away from the cheerful lights of town or city. The north wind is shrieking and tearing at this lonely house, like some evil demon wishful to carry it away bodily or shatter it completely. The icy breath of this demon penetrates through every chink and crevice, of which there appear to be many, and the wood-burning stove is my only companion. It is on nights such as these, after the turn of the year, that our thoughts stray away from the present to other scenes and very different seasons. We return in spirit to the time of leaf and blossom, when birds were singing merrily and trout were rising in the pools. We remember many days of glorious sport and keen enjoyment, and then somehow our thoughts take a turn and leap forward. Spring is near, quite near, and it will soon be time to go fishing. We want to talk about it dreadfully. O for a brother

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crank of the fly-fishing fraternity, one who would be ready to listen occasionally and not insist upon doing all the talking, telling all the stories himself. But if we cannot talk we can write, and it is just possible that some dear brother angler will read what we say upon paper. There is some comfort in that idea, so here goes.

Why is it that with all the improvements made in fishing tackle in recent years we have but few patterns of artificial flies copied direct from nature? From the hosts of flies to be found on many of the hard-fished waters of the Eastern and Middle States? The imitations sold in the shops were nearly all of them copied from English patterns originally, and these, of course, were not taken from American flies. Our original patterns are largely fancies, combinations in colors pleasing to the eyes of man and are used as lures, not as imitations of any insect. Many of them are very killing in the waters for which they were created, but there is something extremely fascinating in the successful imitation of one of the smaller ephemera, when we can believe that our fine basket of trout was due to our care in getting the colors and size just right. Fancies and lures are very well and are absolutely essential in Maine and the Dominion of Canada, but there are streams where at times and upon occasions our ability to match an insect on the water means a full basket, while all the fancies in creation will scarcely raise a fish.

Probably all anglers of experience who fish the waters of New York and Pennsylvania can recall many instances when the trout were rising freely, yet would have little or nothing to do with any of the artificial flies presented for their acceptance. Usually no great effort is made to ascertain what the trout are taking. Frequently they are said to be midging or playing, when such is not the case. It is often difficult to see the natural flies upon the water, particularly in the evening, when the heaviest rise often takes place after the weather has become genial.

If the angler is in the habit of looking about for insects he will be apt to see a few specimens of the prevailing flies at odd times during the day, and these may serve as a guide when the rise comes on. Not only this, but if he can match the colors of the flies he finds he may take more and larger trout than he would with a purely fancy fly, even

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if he meets with but few rising fish during the entire day. A little attention paid to the entomology of our trout streams certainly adds considerably to the pleasure of fly-fishing. An illustrated work with which to identify them is very desirable; I do not know of any book of this kind published in America. It may be said that it is too much trouble to be always hunting about for insects, and that the occasions when an imitation of the natural fly is required are few and far between. This last is not true of some of our best streams, and no one who has ever hit off the right fly during a good rise of trout will be apt to consider his efforts or time wasted. Sometimes one may take fish almost as fast as he can cover the rises which may be seen on every hand. I have seen a large creel nearly filled in an hour or two. In one instance a skillful angler, familiar with the water, took over forty fair-sized native trout in less than one hour. He had but one fly that was of any service whatever; I had not even that one and could do nothing.

Fishing with a dear friend many years ago, I noticed that the trout were taking a small yellow fly, and found that I had two yellow hackles in my book. One of them was a very pale shade of yellow, the other a little darker. I gave the former to my friend and he began to kill trout at once. They would not take any other, so we arranged to fish turn about with his rod, each of us casting until we caught or lost a fish. Fishing with three flies in the old way, the whole catch has been made with the middle fly, the worst position on the cast. Queerer than this, a black hackle with a thin silk body was taken every time, while a precisely similar fly with black mohair body was entirely ignored. With the right fly you may have fine sport when better anglers on the same water are having little or none.

The body and legs of a fly are most important. If they are correct in coloring we can do without wings. There must be great numbers of American birds that have been ignored by the fly dresser. Who can tell me of a bird whose primary and secondary wing feathers are of a pale delicate dun color? It must not be a bird protected at all seasons by law, and the fibres of the feathers must be fine and cohesive. I never fancied dyed feathers for small flies, yet the art of dying is now comparatively easy to acquire, as a simpler process gives excellent results.



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As regards the imitation of natural flies, any man who does much of his fishing in one locality can get up an imitation or two that may add considerably to his success and pleasure. In doing this he will become familiar with the natural insect and acquire the habit of looking out for and studying them.

Fortunately, many of our flies are not mere atoms. I have some flies in a little tin box that are said to be the exact size of the natural insects which rise on the English streams, and the hooks are mere specks. All these flies are what we call midges, and only put up occasionally. Over there they are in daily use. We have many tiny insects, but the flies common to our waters certainly average much bigger than the little artificials I have mentioned. When used in these small sizes, hooks must be of first-rate quality or despair will be our portion. I remember fishing where small flies were the rule and quite necessary to success. I sent at once for a box of small hooks and dressed a lot of flies upon them. They proved to be brittle and I had a wretched time of it. It was all right as long as I hooked nothing over half a pound in weight, but at least three out of five fish above that weight were lost, many of them at the last moment, when they were done for and should have been mine.

There is great advantage in having confidence in the fly you are using. Much time is lost in making changes if one is in doubt as to the correct pattern. With a favorite fly one goes ahead, fishes his best and makes no alteration in his cast unless special conditions demand it. There are certain colors and combinations that can always be relied upon to kill a few fish. Other flies there are which are in good repute, yet sometimes are of no use whatever, except to catch baby trout. The fly we want is the one that will be accepted by the big fish. Two equally good anglers fishing together may take the same number of trout, but the fellow who has the right fly will have the heaviest creel. If a certain fly has been upon the water morning and evening for several days, even in small numbers, the larger fish will be apt to patronize an artificial of the same color.

We must put up the exact shade if possible. The backs of natural flies are usually much darker than the bellies, so they should be examined from below before making up an imitation. We sometimes find

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flies that greatly resemble insects common on the other side of the Atlantic. Last summer I saw a few corresponding to the beautiful little Jenny Spinner for the first time. They were larger and the red, instead of being at the head and tail of the fly, was under the wings in the middle of the body. The clear, glassy wings and milk-white body with this rosy tinge made up a very pretty fly. It would be impossible to match those wings in feathers, but a body of rose and white with a very pale creamy badger hackle might answer.

Usually I prefer to imitate the dun or subimago stage of existence, as the duns are more in evidence upon the water than spinners. In fact, a medium-sized dun is hard to beat as a standby on any stream. They are seen in many shades, as the temperature of the air affects the color, darker in cold, lighter in warm weather; and as all the ephemeridæ pass through this stage of existence, several sizes are useful.

The question of size is a very important one, and it is often difficult to determine which is the best size of hook to use. To a certain extent only, one may be guided by the size of the stream he is fishing, as, in a general way, the larger the stream the more large flies one will see, and the bigger, in season, the hook may be. Hooks Nos. 8 to 14, old style of numbering, will answer most purposes in New York and Pennsylvania.

When we use the fly as a lure, representing something alive, not necessarily an insect, but appealing to the predatory savage nature of game fish, we are working upon a different basis of action and may try a very large pattern of unusual colors or make-up, more particularly if we are in pursuit of trout of unusual size which we have reason to believe are not often surface feeders. These big fish are not in the habit of feeding upon small flies, although they may accept one if they are in position in shallow water or near the surface, but they are seldom found in such positions. It is hard to raise trout over three pounds in weight, yet they will rise if one is fortunate enough to find them well on the feed. In fact, there are not many small things, seemingly possessed of life, that these Jumbos will not move at if they are hungry. They can do without food for some time. If the water is warm they feed little, but when they do go out to dine they want a regular gorge in many courses.

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I cast over one three-pound trout that was feeding upon minnows near the edge of a gravel bar in a big pool for the best part of an hour. At last I went above, and getting out a long line almost hung the fly over the spot where the minnows were skipping. Then it was taken. This trout was simply crammed with fresh silvery minnows. They must all have been taken very recently, and there were lots more to be had near that bar, yet the old glutton grabbed my little dun, just by way of an olive or anchovy.

A combination of red and white may provoke a savage dash from a big fish, but speaking now of the Middle States, my experience is that they do not often take it in. If small flies fail I prefer something mothy-looking with good long hackles to give life to the fly. Occasionally they will take a floating fly, and I have had several very exciting experiences of this when big trout sprang out of the water in striking at the fly. They presented a splendid spectacle which I shall never forget. One cleared the surface and struck down with open mouth upon the fly, and kept it, as it was tied on cobweb gut. Another sailed into the air without touching the artificial, and I got him in the evening when the strong light was off the water. I did not dare to try him again immediately, as I thought he was suspicious, and the sun was still well up in the western sky.

The light has much to do with our success or non-success in fly-fishing. At times in strong sunshine and in certain states of the atmosphere our artificial flies, even the very best of them, are the most transparent clumsy frauds imaginable. The finest gut shows up like an ocean cable, and we feel that we are miserable, low-down humbugs. With the light of day in our favor at the right angle, all things are vastly different. Our casting line is invisible and the flies appear on or in the water as dainty living insects, quite sufficient to deceive the wariest old three-pounder that ever wagged a fin.

Fortunately for the fly-fisher, all round-eyed creatures are deficient in visual impressions of form as compared with man and his almond eyes. Trout appear to be able to discriminate in the matter of color, as a slight difference in shade will sometimes affect the killing qualities of flies tied to the same pattern. They quickly detect any movement upon the part of the angler, and are often alarmed by

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shadows cast upon the water. A man standing perfectly still will not be noticed by fish, and this is true of many wild animals; deer, for instance. I was amused recently to note that the turkeys outside my window were greatly frightened by the shadows of sparrows which were flying from tree to tree.

Trout are wonderfully expert in concealing themselves in small brooks during long drouths in summer. One may be able to count every pebble on the bottoms of the pools and nothing may be seen except a few small trout, suckers and minnows, yet there may be trout of from one pound up in those very pools. The big fish know that they are in danger during the low water and become extremely shy. If they feed at all it will be at night. In a full stream, with an abundance of water above and around them, they feel safe. In dry seasons try the large pools after sunset. You may be rewarded. If you know the habitat of a big trout, go for him again and again. By persevering you will find him on the feed at last.

I fished for one fish for more than two weeks before I got him, and had cast over his lie at least fifty times on the successful evening before he rose. In this case a short line cast from a different direction turned the trick. One can never learn all that there is in fly-fishing. Only men of limited experience think that they know it all. A few patterns of flies will usually answer all purposes on any river or lake, but it is not wise to despise a large assortment. They can all be stowed away in small compass, and one never knows what strange combination of fur and feathers may be useful some day.

There are few things more interesting than a good collection of artificial flies. My fingers itch to open any old fly-book I see. All fishing cranks enjoy looking over a good angling kit, rods, flies and tackle. A visit to a first-class fishing-tackle shop is more interesting than an afternoon at the circus. If one has leisure, fly-making is an absorbing occupation and there is considerable satisfaction in taking trout with the work of one's own hands. I was driven to it many years ago by the difficulty experienced at that time in getting just what I wanted at the stores. I wished to imitate certain insects, some of which were very small and required small hooks tied on fine-drawn gut. Nowadays I use eyed hooks as often as hooks tied on snells and find the

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Pennell very good for hooking and holding. It certainly is a nuisance trying to knot the eye to the cast when the light is bad. The sproat is excellent, if you can get it correctly made, and the sneck is also useful, but of late years there is a tendency among manufacturers to shorten the shanks of hooks unduly. This is bad, I think. I hate a dumpy hook for fly-fishing.

In many of our streams the European brown or yellow trout now outnumber the native fish, and one never knows when he may stir up a regular buster. Then, indeed, we are in need of the best possible hook and tackle. If we have been careless in regard to these things the result may be a most regrettable memory which may haunt our minds for years. Just imagine losing a trout above six pounds in weight through the use of an old fly with a worn gut link. I have had that bitter experience and others nearly as annoying. With an abundant supply of food there is almost no limit to the growth of these brown trout. They have been taken up to nine ponds at least, and I saw two specimens at large during low water in the Beaverkill that were very large. One of these could be seen any day from the public road, and was estimated at seven pounds. I thought he would weigh about six. The other I saw only twice, as he lived in a small hole in what was a big pool in a good stage of water, and was usually under a flat rock that barely covered his vast proportions.

The first time I saw the fish I was standing on the edge of this hole in shallow water watching a school of big suckers to see if any trout were among them. Suddenly this enormous fish appeared from under his stone, almost directly below me and not more than eight feet away. I did not move a muscle, and for some time he remained there, gently waving fins and tail and opening and shutting his great gills. Once or twice he opened his mouth and yawned; I suppose he was probably tired of low water and a slim diet. It was a male fish in grand condition, rather light in color and brilliantly spotted. In about ten minutes he swam quietly back to his house of stone, but had quite a time getting under cover. He went in head first and then worked around sideways until tail and body disappeared from view.

I found him taking the air only once, about two weeks after my first call, and this trout was absolutely unknown; no one had ever seen

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him. Not wishing to be considered a greater prevaricator than necessary, I have always reported this fish at eight pounds, but in my soul I believe that he weighed nearly or quite ten pounds. That trout has never been caught. He is there yet, and now weighs anything you please. Go and catch him, my brother; it will be a feather in your cap. What is more to the point, I will help you all I can by revealing, in strict confidence, the pool where he lived, and where he probably still remains. Those big fish dwell in the same place for many years. I had positive knowledge of two trout in the same pool for four or five years before they were snared, and had played one of them to the point of exhaustion when the hook broke at the bend.

To return to the fish. The pool is near the public road. You can slip in some evening and have him out in a jiffy. Be sure to carry a large grain sack with you to hide the fish in until you get to your quarters. I can tell you where to have him stuffed, and he will look bully on the wall of your sanctum. I would have caught him myself if the water had not been too low.

### OUTRAGEOUS TAILS TO TROUT FLIES— BARBLESS HOOKS

F. G. [THE *Fishing Gazette* editor, R. B. Marston, wrote  
APRIL 21, 1906 *the following editorial, in which is included a note  
from Gordon:* It is about time some of our fishing-  
tackle makers who make flies put some decent limit to the breadth  
and length of the tails they put on trout flies. If they looked at the  
natural duns they would find that the so-called tails are extremely  
fine and delicate hair-like appendages, and never exceed three in num-  
ber. Also they are not in nature found stuck together, and sticking  
out in the same line as the body, but are cocked up at an angle like  
a turkey's tail feathers when "showing off," and in fan shape. I have  
seen trout flies by good makers with tails like a bird of paradise. I was  
much struck the other day with a Blue Upright sent to me by an  
American amateur fly maker, Mr. Theodore Gordon, who occasion-  
ally sends us interesting notes. In this fly the tail is made of fibres  
from the very delicate minutely barred summer duck feather, as

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used whole for Mayfly wings. Mr. Gordon makes each delicate spike stand out separate from the others, and cocked up at an angle of about forty-five degrees. Tails made of two, or at most three, fibres finer than the finest needles, taken from medium size natural red and blue cocks' hackles, are as good as anything for tails of flies which are not barred and for barred mallard and summer duck, providing the finest fibres only are used for the shorter fibres side of the feather. Thick tails are as objectionable as those short, stubby hare's hairs used by some makers for the Hare's Ear Dun as a hackle at throat. They quite mask the body of the fly, which should always be visible through its so-called legs. Mr. Gordon writes:

"Dear Mr. Marston: Have you ever seen the barbless hooks made and used for fly-fishing by Mr. Seth Green, the father of American fish-culture, and his brother? I found a few this morning made from needles by Green himself many years ago, and have tied a fly on one to send to you. If this hook was not sneaked a trifle it would entirely lack the quality of 'initial engagement' of which we have heard a good deal. In Hardy's new oval shanked salmon hooks something is sacrificed, I think, to this quality, the point being directed very slightly away from the shank. In the old-fashioned O'Shaughnessy hook the point was turned out more decidedly, and for many years this form of hook was considered the best by many good anglers in this country. At one time all the Tweed salmon flies for use over here were tied on very heavy wires of this form. They might be called 'big little' hooks, being very strong, with wide bend, and the flies were small relatively. Some people think that this is the best hook for salmon flies to this day.

"It is so cold and windy that I am obliged to pass a dull day nursing the stove. However, it is easy to make hackle flies with fingers only, and only a few simple materials are required. There was one vast ice-jam some miles below here, and when the thaw and rain of ten days since occurred it went out in a hurry, leaving the wide bottom lands at that point covered with heavy ice. Up here we scarcely felt that rain at all, as there is so much more swift water. No damage done to trout up to this time, but there is very little snow in the woods compared to what there usually is at this season. It is no use to borrow trouble, and we may have a wet spring and summer."

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

I have often seen barbless hooks made from steel needles. In some parts of Switzerland and the Tyrol the natives dress killing hackle flies on hooks made by themselves out of steel needles—the point is generally turned in towards the shank. Being so fine they show little, and penetrate more easily than a barbed hook, but they are not going to supersede the real hook. I believe Mr. Seth Green caught scores of trout on one barbless hook (not the “Edgar” barbless, as that has really two points) consecutively to show the hook did not drop out if you kept a tight line all the time.—R. B. M.]



## SULLIVAN COUNTY NOTES

F. S.  
MAY 12, 1906

LAST FRIDAY, May 4, was apparently made to order for fly-fishing. The sun shone warm and bright, which is favorable early in the season. The wind was from the southwest, upstream, the best of all winds for most of the trout streams in this region. The water clear and just the right height. Could heart of angler desire more? My throat was swollen double size and I dared not fish. I hope, however, that the day was enjoyed by many good anglers in many parts of the country; certainly everything seemed to be in their favor. There is, in my opinion, nothing like this soft, upstream wind, strong or a mere zephyr, for causing natural flies to hatch out and trout to rise freely.

Some years ago, on a hot July morning, a friend and myself tramped in hopeless mood five miles up a well-known river. We expected poor sport but wished to be on the water. It would seem to be cooler near it, anyhow. Between ten and eleven o'clock the wind changed and a soft, refreshing breeze came up from the southwest. In a few minutes a considerable number of small blue duns, with long tails, began to hatch and were blown upstream as they rose from the



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

water. Soon the dimples made by rising trout were seen on the still pools and slow-flowing water, and our spirits rose. By three o'clock we had seventy trout, divided about equally between us, but the fisherman who stuck to the color of the natural fly had much the heaviest creel, having, in point of fact, taken all the large trout. He had given two of the blue-bodied flies to his friend, but the latter, after losing one of them, preferred to go on with a pet fly of his own tying (a standard fly). At this the small fish rose freely but nothing over the quarter pound. All were the native brook trout, *Salmo salvelinus*. I do not believe that we would have taken a dozen fish unless the wind had changed, as described.

Prospects are now excellent. Nothing except heavy rain, causing a freshet, or discoloring the water can spoil the sport. Trout are not very shy in May and, being hungry after the winter's shortcomings, are usually well on the feed.

Some fine sport has been enjoyed during the past week. The water has been quite low and clear, and trout were taking well. The upper Beaverkill flows at a high elevation, but the river does not appear to feel the effects of the snow water as long as some others in the county. Consequently the fish were rising as soon as the freshet of the first few days of the season ran out. However, the fishing was not first-rate until the week after. Heavy baskets were made on May 4; one of 15 pounds reported to me.

## SULLIVAN COUNTY NOTES

F. S. BEAVERKILL, N. Y.—Last Tuesday morning the  
MAY 19, 1906 hills were white with snow, good thick ice formed during the night and the outlook was dreary in the extreme. At 2 o'clock the wind backed to the southwest and the sun came out bright and warm. I seized my old Leonard at once, and in half an hour was casting my flies upon a good rift. By 5:30 I had sixteen good trout in my creel and was satisfied to reel up and return to my quarters in time for tea.

Upon that long-celebrated stream, the Beaverkill, the fishing has been wonderfully good, much better, in fact, than for many years

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

past. Fresh blood has been introduced by at least one or two of the clubs, and the protection afforded to portions of the river not open to the public may have benefited the whole stream. I think myself that the great measure of success enjoyed by anglers has been due to the absence of heavy rain and the comparatively low state of the water, which is perfectly clear. I saw a dish of about ten pounds of good trout taken by a well-known guide and fisherman of Fallsberg and the angler who was with him in something less than two days. The weather was so cold that worm was used in killing a part of the fish. This man said that his favorite flies for spring fishing were Seth Green, Wickham's Fancy, Cahill, Royal Coachman and one or two others. Nearly every list contains the Cahill, and it is certainly a grand fly, good all through the season. Which is the better pattern, the dark or the light Cahill, is a mooted point. Some of the best anglers I know prefer the pale blue dubbing body, others the darker fur for body.

If any of our amateur fly-tying friends are not acquainted with the good qualities of muskrat fur let them obtain a supply at once. It should be easily got at any furrier's. Cut off the long, stiff hairs and pull out the fine soft fur underneath. It is a delightful material to work with, as it is very easily spun upon the waxed silk. It is certainly far superior to the English water rat fur which was sent to me some years ago from the other side of the big sea water. Mole's fur is very dark and as it is very short in fibre is difficult to spin smoothly and evenly upon the hook. We must have it, however, for the American grannom, which rises in great numbers upon some of our mountain streams in June. We can find wings of the correct color for this fly, but the legs are the very mischief. I dressed six patterns of this fly upon one occasion and only in a single fly did I get the legs just right for the fish. I think I have an abundance of hackles of the right color this year, but cannot be sure of this until I test them practically over the critical eyes of the trout; that is the court of last resort. However, we are always privileged to bring the case up for trial again where the natural insects are numerous for nearly three weeks.

I received this week an artificial fly which has become quite celebrated in England under the name of Tup's Indispensable. The gentleman who very kindly mailed it to me says that the composition

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

of the body is a secret known only to one tackle maker, who, of course, does not care to give it away. It is a very plain little fly but when held up to the light one can see the shining semi-transparent effect produced by the combinations of dubbing in its body. The hackle of this one is blue dun, but it may be honey dun, that rarest of rare hackles in this country.

On Saturday afternoon, May 12, there was a fair hatch of natural flies, the first I have seen this season. It was a very small dark dun and none of the many anglers on the stream had anything much like it. However, only the small trout were taking it; the big fish probably considered it beneath their notice. In the morning I had to go to the village with mail, and knowing that there was a good big pool and several rifts near it, I carried my rod. The river was simply full of chips and sawdust from a mill half a mile above, and that pretty piece of water was ruined for the time being. Not a trout would rise until I tramped up above the tail race of the mill. I was very anxious to kill a few good fish for friends who were coming up in the afternoon and at last I succeeded. They were not many, but were fairly large fish. This is a great time of the year for anglers; they were strung along the river yesterday as far as one could see.

The hatch of naturals greatly encouraged me, as I hope that I shall see all the spring insects on the water within the next few weeks. It adds so much to one's pleasure when the trout are rising at something one can try to imitate, even when failures predominate. A man will often take more fish when very few flies are on the water.

## AMERICAN NOTES

F. G.  
MAY 19, 1906

THE MORE I SEE of your river reports, which I often glance over, the greater becomes my surprise at the numbers and varieties of fish taken. The Thames, particularly, is a wonder, surrounded as it is by a dense population and passing through a city of four million inhabitants. Trout and pike, and many species of the fish you call coarse. How can the last-named increase and grow to any size among so many predatory neighbours? The pike are not small fish; they average well up in weight,

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

and the little fellows must be returned to the water. Here on this side, lakes or ponds inhabited by pickerel rarely hold other fish than members of the perch family and minnows, and our common pond pickerel, or pike, is seldom taken above 5 lb. or 6 lb. We have many big pike, of course, in the lakes and streams affected by those fish, mascatongue, great northern pike, blue pike, pike-perch, sometimes called salmon or lake-salmon, but I do not think that you will find anywhere in this country so many species of common (or coarse) fish and game fish living together in the same water.

What a remarkable blessing this circumstance must be to the poor man and the hard-worked millions of London town. The roach alone is worth a million pounds per annum in health and pleasure to your country, as he seems to thrive everywhere, and gives scope for that skill and care in his capture that makes angling the popular sport of the many. Our roach is a pretty but miserably small fish, and I do not remember hearing of its being fished for anywhere except in the vicinity of Philadelphia. Our chub is very similar to your fish of the same name. It affords fair sport with grasshopper bait, fly-rod and light tackle. It will take the artificial fly occasionally, but never exceeds 3 lb. in weight. I never saw one much over 2 lb. The common yellow perch of both countries are identical, I think. Our bream are southern fish. The blue or copper-nosed bream is a fine fish, excellent upon the table. You are without the fresh-water bass of either species, but this, I imagine, could be easily remedied. The bass fishing in our eastern and middle States is in many cases the result of stocking or transplanting. The fine sport had in the Potomac River and all of its tributaries is due to a few mature fish carried across the Alleghenies in the tender of a locomotive engine. These were small-mouth; the big-mouth bass were native to the river. It would scarcely be wise to introduce this fish into your rivers, I think. It is a savage fish in some respects. If you interview any old dweller upon the banks of the Delaware, he will tell you how, before the advent of the small-mouth bass, he could go out at any time and catch a mess of perch and pickerel for his family. Now there are many bass, but the season in that river when they bite well is short, and the fish is rather uncertain at the best of times. We have no barbel. I believe the catfish might be claimed as a substitute, per-

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

haps. We possess a wonderful variety of edible fish. There is no doubt that our fish markets at least equal, if they do not surpass, yours, but that is not the point at all. What I am thinking of and wondering at is the number of different species found in the same place and apparently thriving together even when enemies, and when one forms the food of another species.

The Neversink is in spate, and at this writing is a wild, rushing, roaring torrent; pools are almost obliterated, and one can hear the voice of its turbulent flood all night long, if he is not a good sleeper. The wind blew cold from the north-west, but the sun shone brightly, and I was finally tempted to take my old Hardy down to the river and try a few casts. Of course, it was useless, but I made a valuable discovery in so doing. When donning my waders, I saw that my brogues were hard and out of shape, but at the same moment my eyes fell upon a substitute. Last winter my light rubber boots were practically worn out as far as the feet were concerned, so I went to the country store at Neversink and purchased a pair of rubber shoes to go over them. These shoes were what are called "Snag-proof Arctics," and are very strong and durable. This afternoon I put this pair of arctics on instead of the regular wading shoes, and found that they were extremely comfortable, easier to walk in, and gave a good footing on the rocky bottom of the river. I am so pleased with my snag-proofs as wading shoes that I intend to bring them to the attention of my friends in the fishing tackle line and see if they will take the matter up. They might improve the article a little and place a few nails in the rough sole as well as in the heel. Arctics usually have a buckle at the instep and are easily put on and taken off. Mine cost two dollars ten cents at a country shop where things are not usually sold at a low price. The rubber is very solid and the soles heavy and roughened, to give a good footing on snow and ice. Some objections may be discovered later, to this new use of arctics, but I cannot now think of any.



## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

I was greatly pleased when I heard the little frogs and peepers so early as April 15, as I presumed that these creatures were instinctively weatherwise, and that their advent heralded continued mild, springlike weather. I am sorry to say that, according to the country wiscacres and ancient superstition, peepers in April foretell frost in May. This is very sad: sad for us and sad for the peepers. 'They will have to fold up their little air bladders, or whatever the thing is that they blow up and peep with, and go right down into the mud again. Peepers, I presume I should add, are little toads; I prefer frogs myself. I do not object to holding a nice, clean, cold little frog in my hand, but fear that my childish belief that toads make warts has never been entirely eradicated. How such things stick to one! It makes me a little uncomfortable, even to this day, when a large piece of glass, such as a mirror, is broken in the house. I tied half a dozen flies to-day that would have made the dry-fly purist weep. The hooks were No. 8 old style; body, hare's and muskrat's fur, with a blue dun hackle from head to tail, gold wire over this, and a tag of scarlet ibis, with gold tip, one or two turns. I was trying to make some kind of larva for high water, which would be easily seen, yet have something remotely akin to nature about it. Not a fly on the water to-day, yet I have seen small flies in the air and a large black butterfly with white-edged wings upon a mound of freshly dug earth. There is considerable frost in the ground still.

## AMERICAN NOTES

F. G.  
MAY 26, 1906

THANKS TO THE courtesy of Mr. Mills, of Leonard rod fame, I have been reading the fourth edition of "Dry Fly Fishing in Theory and Practice." I bought "Floating Flies" and "Dry Fly Fishing" when those books were first published, paying fifty cents on the shilling—just double the publisher's price—to procure them in the City of New York. These books were sources of much pleasure and profit to me, also of some pain, as for a time I tried to follow their teachings indiscriminately, without proper or due allowance for the different conditions under which my

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

sport was pursued. For instance, I had a rod made to order which was as stiff as a poker—the manufacturer probably did not understand just what I was after—and used with it a very heavy tapered line. That rod nearly killed me before I summoned up courage enough to give it away. But the profit and the pleasure remained. In fact, I learned much that has been of permanent benefit in the matter of flies and fly-fishing. How much we owe to the good sportsmen who have condensed the practical experience of a lifetime in the printed pages of a book! I have learned to tie every kind of artificial fly, from the largest salmon fly to the smallest midge, from books. The modern writer (more particularly Mr. F. M. Halford), with aid of illustrations, makes the whole process so clear that anyone who really wishes to do so can learn. Uncle Thaddeus Norris' book, "The American Angler," taught me to tie wet flies; Mr. P. D. Malloch, in the *Fishing Gazette*, taught me to make salmon flies, and I also owe something to Captain Hale, whose book I read some years later.

I have read this (fourth) edition of "Dry Fly Fishing" with great interest, and feel inclined to jot down a few of the impressions it has made upon me. It seems absurd, yet I feel sadly discouraged over Mr. Halford's change of opinion in regard to the exact-shade-of-colour theory. If we have faith in the trout's ability to distinguish colours and the shades of those colours, we have firm ground under our feet, a rational basis of action, and satisfactory explanations of many puzzles. Such a belief need not limit us to strict imitation of the natural in all cases. We know that trout sometimes take flies because they resemble those upon which they are feeding; frequently they will take nothing except a good copy of a particular insect, but again they take the artificial for no such reason. It is alive (apparently), and they wish to kill it. It is red, red and white, or red and blue, and excites their predatory, ferocious instincts. In many wilderness streams and lakes, where natural water-born flies are extremely scarce, the fly-fisher must use his fly as a lure, not as an imitation. It must have life and attractive colours; it cannot be cast and allowed to rest where it falls; it must have movement—sometimes drawn along the surface, again, with short, slow jerks, well sunk. One can move trout with a red and white fly in streams where they will rarely take it in, only dash at it. It ex-

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

cites them just as a red cloak excites a bull or a turkey-gobbler. In the days of the early settlers, a favourite bait was the ventral fins of the native brook trout, red and white, or red, yellow, and white, skittered on the surface of the water or even sunk. My extraordinary Bumble-puppy fly kills because it is wonderfully alive. It is just about as good for one game fish as another, showing that as a rule it is not taken as a fly at all. It was created to catch black bass in the first instance.

If I thought that trout were colour-blind, or nearly so, I am afraid that I would lose at least one-half of the delight I have in fly-fishing. While the snow-water was in the river and there was not a fly hatching last week, I could not take a trout until I tied up a thing intended to resemble a large larva or nymph, with a red tag. With that, in a few hours in two afternoons, I killed thirteen trout from 2½ lb. down. None of the native fly-fishers would go out, as they said it was useless; the trout would not rise. I could cover pages with instances where a slight difference in the shade of a Dun or other fly has made all the difference between taking trout and not taking them—an alteration, for instance, in the hackle in flies tied to same patterns. Another blow to me was to find that the Alder was never on the water. Many years ago I had a weakness for that fly, dressed very small—probably from reading Charles Kingsley's "Chalk Stream Studies." It is so long ago that I am not sure if this is the correct title of those charming sketches.

In Halford's "Dry Fly Fishing" I see that "Red Spinner" and "Detached Badger" were fishing together at the end of May, 1815—the year the Battle of Waterloo was fought—yet they are both active men in the world of affairs and fishing. However, this is probably a printer's error.

I was much interested in the fact—noted in "Dry Fly Fishing"—that dry-fly fishers have taken to hand lining trout when they go to weed, as that was the way I first learned to fish for trout. In the Cumberland Valley, in Pennsylvania, there are many fine streams that gush forth in full volume from a great spring or springs in the solid limestone rocks of that section. These differ from the mountain streams to the north and south, in flowing through comparatively level country, are slow-flowing, with short riffles and many dams. There is much



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

moss in these streams; they are full of food for trout and are well stocked. It is not easy to take the trout after the first few days of the open season. On one of them, usually known as the "Big Spring" (I forget its proper name), the catch used to foot up 3000 to 4000 trout on the opening day, over 100 rods being at work.

The native anglers made their own rods of two pieces of hickory, lashed or ferruled together and painted green. Usually they cared not for a reel, but wound the surplus line in one place on the rod, carrying it from that point and hitching it at the extreme tip. As a rule they used but one fly, and cast about 35 ft. to 40 ft. When a trout rose and was hooked the rod was dropped into the hollow of the left arm, and the fish was played and landed by hand. They did not allow much law. As my first experience was gained by the side of one of these old fish-hawks, I very naturally imitated him and fished in the same way until I learned better. The streams just mentioned would be ideal, I should think, for dry fly. I intend to revisit them, but probably the majority of them are no longer open to the public. If stocked with brown trout they would produce very large fish. I never saw a native trout in them over 2½ lb. to 2¾ lb., but they were perfect in shape and condition. I saw the fact published in a newspaper some years ago that the Big Spring had been stocked with rainbow trout, but have not heard if the experiment was successful. Probably not, as these streams are not suitable for the rainbow, which delights in heavy water, and can lie in a tearing rapid 4 ft. or 5 ft. deep. At least the one stream in the east where the *Salmo irideus* was introduced with great success was a big, rushing mountain river, with a grand cañon (that is, a grand cañon for the east), and frequently the fish would be found where the current was very strong—occasionally at the top of a rapid. They had a habit of bolting down stream at once, and this, where deep wading and a bad footing were the rule, made the killing of large fish exciting and difficult. The only course to follow was to have lots of line on the reel, let them go, and get on shore as quickly as possible. Even after arriving on *terra firma* the going was dreadful, but the grey scum on the rocks had dried off. What a wonderful man Mr. Marryat must have been, and what a privilege it is to meet such occasionally in our rambles through the world. Kind, genial, and generous, with the

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

innate nobility and strength of character which we presume should be attributes of all men in human form divine. Such a man does this old earth a lot of good, simply by living on it for the few short years vouchsafed to him. I believe that fly-fishing has a good influence on character. We make many lasting friendships through our love of it, and receive many benefits and much help through the kindly sentiments which it inspires. When I was a small, rather weak lad, middle-aged and elderly men inconvenienced themselves greatly to gratify my love of sport. One of them used to carry me from one side to the other of a river which was too deep for me to wade with my short legs. An enthusiastic small boy is not *always* the most desirable companion on a fishing trip. I have rambled away from the point. I wished to say something in regard to the usefulness of Mr. Halford's books in this country. I owe him and other Englishmen a great debt.

### SULLIVAN COUNTY NOTES

F. S.        NEVERSINK, SULLIVAN CO., N. Y.—I had the  
JUNE 2, 1906 pleasure yesterday of seeing one of the really large  
brown trout, whose race, I feared, was almost extinct in the Neversink, at least in this neighborhood. It was a male fish twenty-three inches long and weighed  $4\frac{1}{4}$  pounds on the butcher's scales at Neversink. I was told that the fish weighed 5 pounds, but knew that it would not go that when I saw it. In these mountain streams a trout must be full two feet long to weigh 5 pounds. One is always disappointed in the weight for length of these fish. It was a noble trout, taken with bait. What magnificent sport he would have given on fly tackle.

The weather has been very cool and bright for the last three days, and I enjoyed my half day on the river greatly. A good many small yellow caddis flies were hatching, but these were not greatly favored by the trout. A very few duns were on the water, and I killed my trout on a blue quill. I was told that the trout were taking the yellow higher up the stream, but think my informant was mistaken. I read somewhere, perhaps in Francis Francis, that the trout did not care for a fly called the Yellow Sally, because it was bitter. I did not try chewing the

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

little yellow fly yesterday, as I fancy that raw fly could not agree with the human interior. The water was simply perfect, as clear as the air, bright and sparkling, little or no sawdust.

Most of my trout were got in places that had evidently been passed over. They were troublesome to fish, on account of bushes, trees, and the like. I landed a fine pair to begin with, and having only seen one trout rise, was considerably puzzled for a time by the resistance I encountered. These brown, or yellow trout, fight like mad things when the water is cold. One fish of about a pound put up a most extraordinary fight for his inches, and finally got off by hitching the tail fly in a rough stone. The trout wanted the dropper skimmed or dropped in the water, and I had this fly at least four feet from the point. The fish did not care for a dry fly yesterday, and only an occasional one rose at the stretcher.

This is the season of rapid development on all sides; the trees have rushed into leaf during the past few days. I think that if one had sat patiently down in the grass he might have seen things actually grow and expand. A few hours made a perceptible difference. How delightfully some of those old-time frontiersmen write. I have been enjoying "In the Lodges of the Blackfeet" in *Forest and Stream* so much. This is an unwarranted digression, but one thinks of many things when resting idly by the water side.

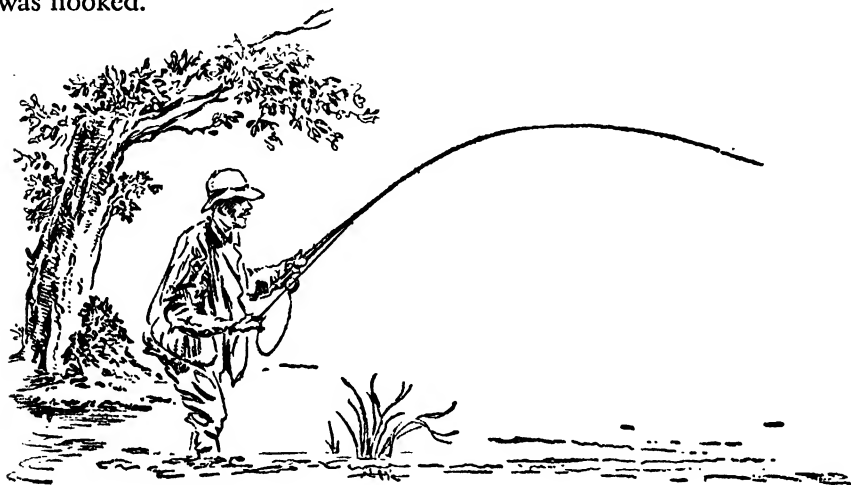
## SULLIVAN COUNTY NOTES

F. S.  
JUNE 16, 1906      NEVERSINK, N. Y.—Heavy rain in the first two days of last week brought down quite a spate and made the water decidedly dirty. The sun came out on Tuesday, but it was only cold with a piercing north wind. Decoration Day was very fine, although the wind was still quite sharp, and I trust that the host of anglers who were out on the upper reaches and smaller streams had an enjoyable day. I know what it is to have but one day's fly-fishing during the year. How hard one works, and how frequently we are disappointed. If we have good sport and can return to the city with a fair basket of trout, we mark that one day with a white stone and hold it in grateful memory.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

Hereabouts the river was still too much discolored for really successful fly-fishing. I did not go out myself, nor did I see many fishermen on the stream. I am becoming more and more interested in the natural flies, and if my friends would only remember to carry a tiny bottle of alcohol in their vest pockets, as a receptacle for insects, instead of crushing the flies in paper, they would assist me materially. It takes time to imitate a natural fly successfully. The insect must be studied and many patterns dressed before one can hope to satisfy the critical eyes of the trout.

I fancy that the dry fly frightens the fish more than the wet fly. Our friend the trout has just taken several tasty natural flies and sees another sailing down upon his nose. He rises with the greatest confidence, and the supposed insect grabs him ferociously, nearly pulls his head off and sticks a needle in his jaw. No wonder he goes wild with fright and races all over the river. If the really big fish were as wild as the ones of half a pound to one pound, I do not know how we could handle them with much success. I hooked a trout of about one pound last week that I would have sworn was at least double that weight, until I saw it. This fish fought like a maniac; and if unseen, would probably have been reported by me as one of those busters that so often get away. It had such pluck that I was not really displeased when the hook lost its hold in a pool way below the one in which it was hooked.



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

June is the loveliest month in all the year, but the fishing is apt to be more difficult than in May. The trout have secured quite a good education in flies and baits by this time, and are in better condition. They are not ready to rise at anything resembling a fly, but will often allow everything to go by untouched, except the natural on the water at the time, or an artificial fly of the same color. I do not think any one can fish these streams regularly without becoming convinced of this, and of the great advantage of imitating this natural insect and carrying a well stocked fly-book. If a man fished one river all through the season he would know just about what was required, and would not need a great many patterns; but when he is a lover of variety and change of scene in his sport, it is hardly possible to have too large an assortment, particularly of small flies, duns, yellows and browns. He may want good red and orange-bodied flies, also.

An old gentleman hooked a very large trout on a store fly last week and played it to the point of exhaustion. He had no net with him and led the trout up to a shelving beach. Then he gave the rod into the hands of his son and bid him hold it steadily. Thus far all was well, but, as he says himself, "I got excited and took hold of the line just above the leader and tried to drag the fish ashore; the gut broke and away went the great fish." He knew better, you see, but he became excited, lost his head for a moment and thus lost his trout. Our old friend thinks that this was surely a five-pounder. Alas! alas!

## SULLIVAN COUNTY NOTES

F. S. IT IS SURPRISING how small a quantity of pure  
JUNE 16, 1906 running water will support good trout. There is a tiny  
nameless brooklet between this farm and the village  
of Neversink, the entire course of which does not exceed one half mile,  
yet this afternoon, when going to the post office after a heavy shower,  
I saw two trout taken from it, one of which was quite twelve inches  
long. I find that after rain this little meadow stream almost invariably  
gives several nice fish to a man who lives near its source, and who  
makes a practice of a few casts with worm bait when the conditions  
are favorable.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

This is probably the last season for fly-fishing in the lower Esopus, as work will soon begin on the great dam, which will be built across the valley some distance below Shokan, I am informed. The millions of inhabitants in New York City must be supplied with pure water, but the summer playground of many thousands of city people will be turned into a great lake. Smiling farms and thriving villages will be covered with water and the aspect of the country will be entirely changed. If the correct view of the matter be taken by the authorities controlling the new lake, there is no reason why fine sport should not be enjoyed upon it in a year or two after the vast work to be done is completed. We have only to look across the ocean to see what has been done in England and Wales with the great lakes and reservoirs which have been created to supply Liverpool, Birmingham and other cities with water. Lake Vyrnwy, in Wales, has afforded fine fishing for many years past, and contains both the brown and rainbow trout. Blagdon Lake is of more recent construction, but the sport enjoyed during the past two years has been really extraordinary. For some time after the water was opened to anglers, the average weight of the trout taken was five pounds, and many larger fish were killed. These were brown trout, but the lake now holds large numbers of fine rainbow trout. Artificial lakes usually soon become much like lakes of nature's creating, and the angler may enjoy his sport amid the beauties which so greatly enhance it.

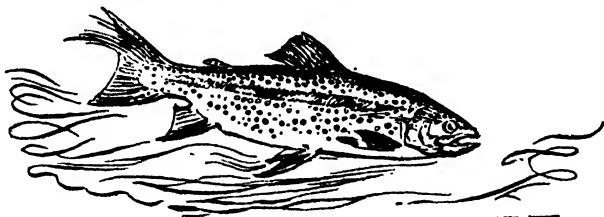
The Esopus now holds three varieties of trout, the brown (*Salmo fario*), the native (*Salvelinus fontinalis*), and the rainbow (*Salmo irideus*), but there are very few of the native fish in the lower portion of the river. At one time it was almost entirely given up to the rainbow trout, which for many years thrived amazingly. Then came the stocking with brown trout, which increased in size and numbers with great rapidity. There are still many rainbows, but they are all small fish. I have not seen one of the old-fashioned one-and-a-half to two-and-a-half-pound fish of this variety for some years, but some very large brown trout have been taken.

The new lake will stock itself, but much can be done to improve the fishing. All anglers should bear this matter in mind, and see to it that this great lake is not closed to them through some mistaken

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

notions in regard to keeping the water pure. Fishing under proper rules and regulations can not injure the water supply, but the lake can and should afford grand sport to the public for many generations to come. To keep down the big cannibals, it may be necessary to allow trolling in the deeps of the lake, but the shallower portions should be reserved for fly-fishing, and no spinning or worm fishing allowed.

The river was high last week and wading was hard work. Went down below Neversink one afternoon more with a view to the enjoyment of the lovely open valley, than with the expectation of catching trout. I only killed seven trout, but I did catch a ducking. There were not many places where the stream could be crossed, and in attempting this at one point, I was almost carried away. I think that I would have been, but my wading stockings, filled with water, and gave my slim legs a weighty support just where they needed it. It would be no joke to lose one's footing in the Neversink when it is high. One would be carried into the next deep pool and maybe drowned. I can remember two fatalities of this description in this neighborhood during the last fifteen years. In one case the victim was an athletic young man, who was a good swimmer. When found in a deep pool three miles above here, the line was wound around his body and a half-pound trout was still on the hook. It is well, therefore, not to take too many chances, although nowadays, during the summer, the river is but the shadow of its old-time vigorous self. A man may wade across the rifts without getting wet above the knees. With every freshet the big pools lose something of their depth. Here and there a scour may occur, and a deeper place be made, but nearly all the changes in the river for many years have been for the worse and not for the better.



## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

### SULLIVAN COUNTY NOTES

F. S.  
JUNE 30, 1906      LIBERTY, SULLIVAN COUNTY, N. Y.—We have been having rainy, muggy, uncomfortable weather for a week. Something unusual for Sullivan County in the month of June. This week one or two days have been first rate for fishing and I have no doubt that excellent sport has been had. A fine basket of native trout, weighing 14 pounds, was brought back from the Willowemoc above Malt Decker's, last week, by a resident of Neversink. A very fine trout was killed on the lower Esopus, recently. This fish was 22 inches long and weighed within an ounce or two of four pounds. It took an artificial fly near the head of a big pool and gave fine sport before it was landed. June is the month for big trout, particularly after a rise in the water. I hear that pickerel are taking well in the Stevensville ponds, west of Liberty. A fine string was caught on Wednesday; largest fish about 4 pounds. The country is very lovely now, yet but few city people have appeared at the resorts for the summer. They never turn out in force until July.

I have had my snag-proof wading shoes half soled and hobnailed and they are now perfect. This is one of the best ideas I have struck for a long time, and I shall bring it to the attention of all of my fishing friends. I fancy they will be first rate for shooting also, as I wore them last fall when out with the gun, and found them comfortable.

I have not heard of many broods of ruffed grouse, but know that a large stock of birds wintered well. I have advice of two broods of woodcock on one small brook; doubtless there are many, as there are some good breeding grounds in this country.

I had a queer experience with a ruffed grouse yesterday when on my way to the post office. I had taken the rod and was fishing near the head of a long shallow pool opposite a steep bank, which was covered with evergreen timber, rhododendrons, etc., when I heard a very strange noise. I could not imagine what it was until a fine hen grouse came creeping along the bank, giving vent constantly to what were certainly the oddest sounds I ever heard a bird make. If you have heard a dog whine when in great pain, that is something like it. Of course, the bird's nest, or her young, were on that bank, but I was on the



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

opposite side of the stream, and at least twenty-five yards away. She scuttled along with me for about sixty yards, and gradually her moaning, heart-rending notes died away. I have seen many mother grouse with little ones, but none ever behaved like this one. Woodchoppers had been felling trees just above the pool. Is it possible that they had taken the bird's eggs or young grouse? I fancy that possibly the horribly noisy reel I was using may have alarmed the hen. She was evidently in great distress.

It was an afternoon of misfortunes; ill-luck was surely with me. I did nothing going down; there was sawdust running. After getting my mail, I returned to the pool behind the post office. All this water is fished to death, and my chances seemed slim indeed. Then the line jammed on that miserable reel, with ten yards or more out, and I spent the best part of an hour clearing it. At last the sawdust let up a trifle, and a trout rose here and there. I put up a small quill and by hard work killed five trout of no great size. Tramping upstream, I found two fish rising and lost them both; then found that the barb of the small hook was gone. Put up another fly and put it over what I thought was the rise of a smallish trout, hooked it and found it was a good one. After a fight, the hook came away at the last moment. By this time dark clouds had covered the sky and the light was bad. I could not see my fly in the water. There was nothing promising between myself and home except one place where a boy, fishing with bait, had been smashed by a large trout. As a last forlorn hope I went there, and soon made up my mind where the fish must lie, if still at home in the same spot. In order to see the fly I tied on a larger quill, which floated beautifully. At the second cast I saw Speckles come at the fly, which she took fiercely; then away she went with a mad rush. The stiff click on my reel made the situation a dangerous one, particularly when the fish turned and went down stream. The stream was swift and a heavy rapid began just below. The aged Leonard bent double to meet this last danger and turned the trout. At last I got the lady into a backwater and landed a lovely golden-yellow trout of over 2¼ lbs. This was one of the crazy fish I have mentioned as being common this year. I was satisfied that I had by hard work, beaten the demon of misfortune for that day, at any rate. I fished no more, but went home as fast as my legs could carry me.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

When we have good luck we come home early; otherwise we stay late and fight it out. How often we are defeated! Everything goes against us and we struggle in vain to conquer adverse conditions, but if we do win out, how pleased we are. We really believe that we can fish.

### ON THE BEAVERKILL

F. S. THE BEAVERKILL at last. After five years \* (I have  
JULY 14, 1906 not seen much of the river yet) I find many changes in its rapid course. New channels have been made and several of the smaller pools have vanished. It will always be an ideal stream for trout, and they are here still—plenty of them—although the season for really good fishing is about over on the lower reaches.

The water is quite warm now, and but few natural flies are hatching. A few rises may be seen in the evening—none during the heat of the day.

I spent my first evening on the stream, of course, and was considerably bored by the silver chub or windfish (known as the fallfish in Pennsylvania). These rascals fell in love with the small fly I was using, hook number 14, and I creeled five of the largest—some people are fond of them. I killed three good trout with the same fly and “a big one got away,” so I think that sport was fair. Yesterday afternoon the heat was intense; a storm was brewing. I lingered too long by the river side and was drenched by the rain before I reached the house. Six trout, one really good fish. The wind has now shifted to the northwest, and the air is like wine, cool and stimulating to weary bodies. I hope that the temperature of the water will be lower, and the fishing better after this change.

I regret that I am too late for the rise of the grannom. I know of no other stream where this fly is so numerous as it is on the Beaverkill. The first half of June is the season for it, and it sometimes rises in swarms at sunset and after. When on the wing, these flies are always seen moving up stream; no matter where you are, they are flying up, yet they must have an ultimate destination. The first successful imitation of the grannom was made by using the crest feathers of a

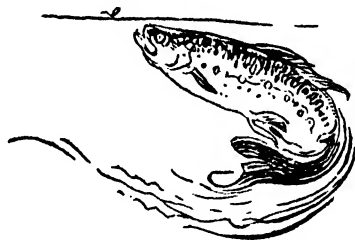
\* On May 19, 1906, Gordon reported briefly on Beaverkill fishing—apparently by hearsay—J. McD.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

kingfisher for the legs. This feather is very small and several may be used. Some kingfishers have black crests. These are useless for the purpose; they must be dark blue, or dun colored, but these feathers are too soft for a floating fly.

I am told that rain enough has fallen to insure good crops, so we shall not lack for fruit and vegetables. I trust that we shall have no drought this year. When I was here last, many of the small tributary brooks dried up entirely and thousands of little trout died upon the dry stones and gravel. Several men have told me this season that all fishing in these small streams should be prohibited. The fry brought from the State hatcheries are placed in them, and some men and boys ignore the six-inch law when fishing in such water. I have seen a lad come from one of these brooks with a string nearly as long as his arm. He had a few decent trout, but the majority were fingerlings. These tributaries are nurseries for the supply of the large streams with good sizable trout, fish that will make the angler's heart beat faster when he hooks them.

The river is right in front of the house and when a new man arrives, you can see that he is restless and ill at ease. Soon he disappears for a few minutes, his oldest togs are mounted and one sees him hurrying to the stream. He is sure that a big trout is waiting for him in the first large pool. He does not always catch the fish, but he is happy nevertheless. Usually he thinks that he has hooked it or has seen it rise. If he does not kill it to-day, he will to-morrow or the next day. The pleasures of anticipation are great. Hope never dies in the angler's breast, and provided that he can cast his flies upon bright waters, he is satisfied. A little luck now and then is enough, and he is better pleased with one good fish than fifty seven-inchers.



## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

### ON THE BEAVERKILL

F. S.        THE WEATHER WAS unusually warm, with great  
JULY 21, 1906    humidity, for many days. The temperature of the  
                 water rose until the batch of natural flies ceased almost  
entirely on the lower reaches of the river. We feared that our fishing  
hereabouts was nearly over, but several refreshing rains, with cool  
nights and mornings, have improved the situation considerably. Heavy  
creels must not be expected; the month of July is not usually very  
favorable for fly-fishing, but the angler who is really in love with his  
art, can basket a few good trout by exercising the virtue of patience.  
It may please him to know that it has been splendid growing weather,  
and that the crops in this part of the State are now well assured.

I have not heard of any large trout being killed on the Beaverkill,  
but they are surely here. I have no doubt that there are fish in some of  
the big pools, weighing at least 5 pounds. These old stagers are very  
wary, and feed mostly at night, when the water is low. After a freshet  
is the best time to try for them, and if one is located, there is a better  
chance for success.

I have often heard that the time of all others to try for a big trout  
is between dawn and sunrise, but I have never been energetic enough  
for this early fishing. A white-miller is said to be great medicine at  
that hour.

The wind-fish, fall-fish or silver-chub have been rather a nuisance  
lately. It is dismally disappointing to find, after hooking a good fish,  
that you have a leather-mouthed chub in tow, instead of a fine trout.  
Some people like to eat chub; the meat is white and rather sweet, but  
full of bones.

The best basket I have had since I came to the Beaverkill was  
made on Friday afternoon, the 7th inst. It consisted of nine trout and  
three chub. Nearly all the former were really good fish. I was so tired  
of dragging heavy waterproofs about (which, by the by, are not water-  
proof), that I waded without them, and was much more comfortable.  
There is no loafing about in fly-fishing, and if one keeps moving and  
changes clothing at once on returning home, there is small chance of  
catching cold in warm weather.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

For at least a hundred years the Valley of the Beaverkill has been celebrated for its beauty and the river for its trout. This (last) spring the fishing has been as good, probably, as at any time during its history. The majority of the fish caught now are brown trout, and the average size of these is certainly larger than the native trout has ever shown in the same water, even in the times of the early settlers.

We take few undersized fish, and most of those I have returned had been *fontinalis*, not *fario*. A brown trout of eight ounces to one pound affords good sport to any one using fine tackle, and this is necessary unless one descends to bait-fishing where the water is discolored.

A few large ephemera have been rising in the evenings this week, but the only flies seen in numbers were of the caddis order; small insects with light yellow and pale green bodies. These are common whenever or wherever the water is cold enough for them to rise all through the summer months.

The fishing is holding out wonderfully well this year in spite of hot sun and scarcity of natural flies. Whenever we have a shower followed by a cool night, there is a good chance for sport the next morning. Something can nearly always be done after the sun is off the water and on into the evening, until it is too late to see where one's fly drops upon the water. By fishing in the darkness a big trout may be killed, but it is not the very best of sport. Fish rarely put up the best fight of which they are capable at night. They do not see the fisherman and the hook gives them little pain. They are apt to bore steadily, yet there is no dash, no brilliant play. However, if you want a big trout, and know where one has taken up his abode, it is always worth while to try for him after "the darkness has fallen from the wings of night," if you have failed to move the fish earlier in the evening.

In July there are not many insects upon the water to serve as a guide in selecting one's fly. If the water is not too warm, a good many small yellow caddis will be seen and the trout sometimes take these freely. This fly has a cousin of the same order, which has a pale green body, by way of variety. The hatch of ephemera makes little show, yet there are a few about nearly every evening, and my experience seems to indicate that they are taken by the trout in preference to

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

any of the caddis flies. What beautiful creatures the ephemera are in their last or perfect state. I have several small bottles on my table, as I write, which contain specimens in alcohol. Some of these are fully one inch in length with bright glassy wings and long legs and tails. Unfortunately, these are very fragile, and if the bottles are knocked about a bit, one's pretty specimens are soon sadly mangled; wings break and legs and tails come off in a very provoking way. It is delightful to be so near trout water, be the sport good or bad; no angler of experience expects great things at this season. If we are favored with sufficient rain to keep the streams in order and the temperature of the water down, a few trout are usually caught by the man who can choose his own hour.

### FROM THE BEAVERKILL

F. S. BEAVERKILL, N. Y.—Fishing is hard work these hot  
JULY 28, 1906 summer days, and the reward of labor is not usually great. Probably the wisest course to pursue is not to start out until after tea; the air is cooler and the dew soon begins to fall. Feeding trout may be seen here and there, and if the fly is put to them just right, it will probably be accepted. The casting line does not show up like a cable, as it does earlier in the afternoon, and the artificial fly is really like a natural insect on the surface of the stream.

On Thursday afternoon I caught first a good ducking in a heavy shower, then seven good trout (besides two 7-inchers, returned), and two fallfish. This I consider very good for the season, time and place.

Another thing, one's trout are appreciated when caught. Many people are extremely fond of them when well cooked, and we feel that we have offered some one a real treat when we bring home good fish. How different it is in the wilds of Maine and Canada! In those regions the only thing to do is to return one's trout to the water, except, perhaps, a few for camp use. When I arrived at Tim Pond, in Maine, red hot for a little fly-fishing, the camp keeper was disgusted with me for killing a dozen trout. He said, "Oh! why did you kill those fish? I had to bury seventy-five pounds this morning." After that I dragged a wooden box behind my boat, and after catching thirty

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

or forty trout, I looked at them and returned them to the lake. Things were rather better at Big Island Pond. There the trout were larger and not so numerous, and I devoted my attention to catching specimen fish. These were kept alive, and if any one going out of the woods wished to take good trout home with him, he was usually glad to accept a few from me. When I left the lake I carried a very few trout with me, iced in a small box. What a nuisance those fish were, until at last they were confided to the steward of the Fall River Line boat and safely stowed away in cold storage.

A 2-pound trout here on the Beaverkill gives one more satisfaction, more real pleasure, than a 5-pounder would if taken in the Maine lakes. Surrounding conditions have much to do with one's sport. A big fish in one section of the country is small in another. Personally, I much prefer a large stream, with its still pools and rough waters, to any lake fishing, no matter how large the fish may be in the latter. I imagine that there are few streams in America more beautiful than the Beaverkill and Neversink. Both flow through fine valleys and afford the greatest variety of mountain scenery. The lover of small-stream fishing can find his place on the upper waters, while lower they attain to the size of small rivers and justify their names. They were never known as "creeks."

I am sorry for the man or woman who finds difficulty in killing time in the country in summer. With me the days fly by all too rapidly. A week is nothing, and we accomplish nothing of importance. The most important event is the occasional capture of an unusually large trout. There are big ones here. Be sure of that. I have reliable information of one which has its habitat not far away, which is said to be full two feet long. If so, it will weigh 5 pounds. Think of that, my boy! Drop that everlasting business, and come and catch him (or her). Even if you kill nothing, you will be happy, and you will be sure to catch chubs. At least, I always do, and must say that it is somewhat disappointing to find that one has a big leathermouth instead of a large, golden trout. Yet the so-called chub is something of a game fish. He rises at the fly and can put up a good fight. The largest I ever killed was 18 inches long; but I have heard of them up to 22 inches, and weighing 3 pounds. When I cannot take trout, I will catch chubs.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

### A NOTE FROM MR. THEODORE GORDON

F. G.

AUGUST 11,

1906

BEAVERKILL, N. Y.—I am delightfully located here, with one of the finest trout streams in the world right in front of the house. Hot weather has injured the sport on the lower reaches of the river, yet one can kill a few trout by hard work. For instance, yesterday afternoon (July 18) I basketed seven trout and two fall fish, returning several small fish. The fall fish, wind fish, or silver chub, is much like your chub, a bright silvery fish which rises at the artificial fly and affords fair sport. As far as I can learn, they never exceed three pounds in weight. Personally, I have never taken them over 18 in. long.

Since June 1, I have fished dry most of the time, but recently the hatch of flies, even in the evening, has been very poor. How I hate warm water in a trout stream! I regret very much that I arrived here too late for the rise of the grannom; I know of no river where it is so numerous as it is on the Beaverkill. It comes on in June, usually by the first week. It is curious that our large stonefly should rise all through the season, but never in great numbers. I have seen them every month from May to October. I have collected a good many interesting specimens of ephemera, but on the Neversink natural flies were not as abundant as they used to be years ago.

[Mr. Theodore Gordon sends me a view of a charming trout stream, the Beaverkill, in New York State, which reminds me of bits on the Eden, Wharfe, and Tweed, and other of our streams where the well-wooded hills come down to the river on each side, but not too abruptly.

Mr. Gordon makes a handsome trout fly. I should think few, if any, American anglers know so much about our flies and fly making and dry-fly fishing as he does. He sends me a fly on cyed hook dressed by himself, called the "Quill Gordon," quill body, silver grey hackle, with a bunch of summer duck fibres for wing—it would kill anywhere. I confess I have an absurd prejudice against clipped wings, and would prefer to see the natural points. If you cannot get a feather small enough, you must cut the wing after making it, unless you cut the fibres clear of the stem and work them that way—tying on the bunch as you would a wing strip.—R. B. M.]



# THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

## FROM THE BEAVERKILL

F. S.  
AUGUST 11,  
1906

WHEN A MEMBER of the angling fraternity learns anything that may be of value to his fellows, it is well to pass it on. Last Monday afternoon, while visiting a summer bungalow on the side of a mountain near here, the owner thereof, an expert amateur fly-maker, gave me his substitute for wax in fly-tying. Wax is always too hard or too soft, too sticky or greasy or not sticky enough. The substitute does away with all this annoyance, and is simple and effective. A few drops of the best coach-body varnish are placed on a small piece of strong paper. This is folded and the silk thread drawn between the folds. At first a little more varnish than is necessary may be put upon the silk, but this is easily remedied by a rub with soft paper. The best way, probably, to use it is to prepare a dozen pieces of silk before beginning work. It is an excellent idea, and as far as I know, entirely original with Mr. Whipple. When the varnish becomes hard or too sticky, another drop or two upon the paper will make it all right. Coach-body varnish is, I presume, copal. It is used on fine carriages, and a small bottle can be bought for a few pennies from any dealer in paints and oils.

In this country we often have great difficulty in getting fine, strong silk for fly-tying. The smallest size made is numbered 000 on the spool, and I have never seen it in any other color than black. It is hard to find and not satisfactory in use. However, all colors can be had on spools marked with the letter "A." This is quite stout, as it is composed of three strands; but these can be separated without great difficulty, if a moderate length, say 18 inches, is taken from the spool. Fasten the end of each thread to a pin stuck into your work table and twist up the strand to the left. Retain the end in the left hand and pass the piece of varnished paper over it. This will hold the twist and the result is a fine thread which may be used in making small flies. Any one who has tried it knows how impossible it is to tie a pretty fly on a tiny hook with stout thread. Only the very best and strongest silk should be bought. Some day I trust that we may be able to buy the finest possible silk in the country.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

In spite of the warm weather we have had at times, there is still some fishing to be had. A large portion of the upper river is preserved, or we could have real good sport at any time by driving a few miles. Yesterday afternoon the sky was overcast and I killed seven trout in about two hours. Then I stumbled into a hole and got well soaked, so tramped homeward as fast as possible. Wet shirt tails do not agree with my constitution, but, all things considered, I think sport was pretty good.

On Tuesday last I had a delightful day on a quarter mile of water some distance up stream. Many of our best clergymen are anglers, and a gentleman of this persuasion kindly drove me to the fishing ground. We took things very easily, yet I had fourteen good trout in my basket when we drove home to tea. By staying on for the evening rise, doubtless the score might have been increased.

The brown trout are often found in shallow water, and the fishing is very pretty. One wades up a broad, rippling stream and casts his fly near rocks, under banks and close to bunches of grass or driftwood. The size of the fish taken sometimes in water only a few inches in depth is quite surprising; but the fly must come down just right to bring them up. I fished for one large trout for at least half an hour, and got him at last by doing wrong, or what is often wrong. I hung a wet fly over him from above. This fish had viewed four other flies with calm disdain. A very small fly is usually best, but in the rough rifts, a larger one will often prove effective. In quieter water the bigger fly may move the fish without taking them. The flies in evidence upon the water are mostly small, except the stone fly, which hatches out irregularly all through the season.

I think that the prejudice against the brown trout, which was common some years ago, has largely died out. It is a noble game fish.

During the months of May and June the trout taken with fly in the Beaverville ran from half a pound to a pound and a half. Many anglers retained no fish under ten inches (say five or six ounces). A half-pound trout puts up a good fight in strong water and frequently makes the reel whiz in his first rush. All the trout, foreign and native, fought desperately this season, and were in good condition soon after the opening.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

I have great trouble in getting hackles and quills for my pet fly at this time. Really, the only way to get first-rate hackles, of all the colors required, would be to have a poultry farm. Not one cock in twenty has feathers worth taking.

We have had sufficient rain for the crops and to keep the river in good order. The humidity of the atmosphere has been excessive, and quite unusual for this region. The barn swallows have already massed together for migration. In fact, the home flock, which inhabited the eaves of the big barn, has already taken its departure.

The male bobolink lost his wedding clothes some time ago, and can hardly be distinguished from the females and young birds. Old and young will soon congregate on the marshes of the Delaware and elsewhere near the coast. There they are the reed bird, our American substitute for the European ortolan. On the first of September great numbers will appear in the markets, with body feathers removed, to show that they are simply little rolls of fat. In a few weeks they will move in countless thousands upon the rice fields of the Carolinas and Georgia. Here also they are tid-bits, fit to tempt any epicure; but they are a curse to the planters, harvesting into their own little bellies a large portion of their crops. Negroes are employed with old muskets and cheap, common powder to keep them off the rice as far as possible. Some planters allow the market gunners to shoot the birds and wade out into the fields after them, but this too injures growing rice.

In Jamaica and other West Indian islands the bobolink, reed bird, rice bird, May bird, etc., is known as the butter ball. He rejoices in many names, and is a great traveler.

The Beaverkill is up today after last night's rain. The sun tries to break through the clouds at intervals, and by to-morrow morning, I fancy, there may be a chance to tempt one of those real big, old brown trout. They must have their homes in some safe retreat in the river, but venture forth at times when food is abundant and there is plenty of water to give them courage. I have heard of a buster or two; and two weeks ago a fish of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  pounds was taken on bait some miles up the river.



## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

### FROM THE BEAVERKILL

F. S.  
AUGUST 18,  
1906

APROPOS OF THE report on "Shad in the Hudson" in *Forest and Stream* of July 28, I remember that shad were no luxury in the vicinity of the Hudson only eight or nine years ago. In the month of June, 1898, I fished the lower Esopus for trout for a few days, then moved up the Big Indian, for a day and night, and made arrangements for a trip across the country to Liberty, by way of Claryville. Shad had been taken in such numbers near Kingston that they were being peddled through the country at twenty and twenty-five cents each. The drivers of the hacks carrying the mails made a good profit by purchasing considerable numbers of the fish and retailing them to the people along their routes. This may have been unusual, but I remember the facts distinctly. There had been a time years before this when the catch of shad in the Hudson had greatly fallen off, and the return of prosperity to the netsmen was entirely due to artificial propagation by the State of New York. There is small reason to doubt that if the river was reasonably pure, the annual catch of shad in the Hudson would be quite as large now as ever it was.

This is not trout fishing, but the silver sides of the many chub I have been catching recently remind me a little of the brightness of a fresh run shad. After the recent freshet, I spotted a number of good trout. By using a fly as a lure in the bright sun. I could make them run at it, although they would not take it in. It was amusing and exciting to see a large trout chase the fly for a yard or two, then turn away with a contemptuous flirt of the tail, at my shabby counterfeit. However, on Friday evening I went for those spotted fish, and if the light had been a little better or my sight stronger, it would have gone hard with them. I would not see the rise until almost too late to strike successfully. The largest trout of the lot rose very fairly, but I left the fly in its mouth. I was using fine gut, and the fly was taken as one picks a berry from a bush. I killed but four trout, but the chubs were in great form and seemed to be really fascinated by my attractions. Within fifty yards of the house in the gloaming I caught two good chub at the mouth of a small brook, where I had seen what I supposed was a fair trout.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

The recent freshet has improved the fishing situation materially. The water is fresh and cool; in fact, it really looks brighter and more attractive than it did two weeks ago. Some fine sport must have been had on the upper waters of all the streams in this vicinity and even in the Catskills, at Big Indian, and elsewhere.

There is no lack of moisture this season. The crops are growing like weeds, and the air is full of humidity. The climate is not as bracing as usual. The common air of this elevated region is like wine—sustaining, strengthening and refreshing; but we have had a deal of wind from the southeast and south to southwest. These are great winds for the angler, blowing as they do upstream on nearly all these rivers, but they are not best for weak persons who need the tonic breeze from the northwest, which commonly prevails.

To return to my fishing. The best basket I have heard of this month was one of forty trout, taken in a fairly large tributary of the Beavercreek. I did not see the fish, but do know the successful angler and am sure that he is not one who would take, or at least kill, any but trout of good size. Such a score is very unusual in free water in July, but the number of trout this year is really wonderful. The streams are full of them. If we have a good spawning season, followed by a moderate winter with no great floods and ice jams, prospects for the future are bright indeed.

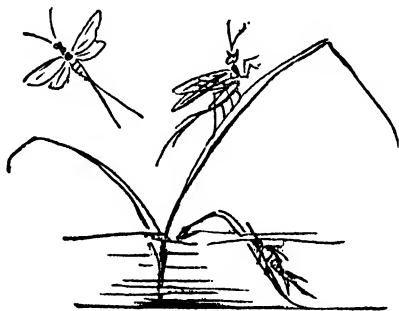
I do not believe that better sport was ever enjoyed on the Beavercreek than during May and June of 1906. The fish have been in fine condition and have fought desperately. Nearly every one has noticed how game the trout were. Then they are so much larger than they used to be in the old days of exclusive native trout, and what a difference this makes to the fisherman! Almost any one is satisfied with half a dozen trout weighing from half a pound to a pound, or a pound and a half, each. We meet few gluttons nowadays. I do not blame the man whose opportunities are few and far between, for filling his basket on the rare occasions when he meets with great success, instead of a big disappointment. Those few hours on one day, when the trout rose fast and furious, mark his one great day. It will be years probably before he experiences anything like such sport again. He never forgets that happy time.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

With modern fishculture and the State hatcheries in operation, there is not that danger of depletion that there was in old times. The brown trout as a breeder and grower is superior to the brook trout.

Some people say it is well to kill off the big fish. I doubt this greatly. Think of the number of big, healthy ova which will hatch into large, strong fry after the mating of a single pair of four-pound fish! There are immense quantities of minnows in all these streams. Have you ever watched a big trout catch minnows? It is done with the greatest ease, and the stomach is literally crammed with them. I have taken trout up to three pounds while they were engaged in this pleasing (to them) occupation, and they were loaded to the muzzle. One three-pounder disgorged sixteen large minnows from mouth and gullet that were as fresh as possible. They had been dead but a few minutes at most.

It is strange that a large trout should trouble himself to rise at a tiny fly when he has an abundance of substantial fare before him. It is the delicate quality, the daintiness of the morsel that tempts him. I remember reading somewhere of an experiment with three tanks, or small ponds, of trout. One lot was fed on flies and their larvae, another on minnows, and the last on worms. The first grew much faster than the others; minnows came next, and worms last. This was with trout of small size, I presume. Probably as a trout gains in bulk he requires minnows, crayfish, etc., to keep on developing rapidly.



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

### THE DRY FLY IN AMERICA

F. G.

AUGUST 25,

1906

IN MAKING bodies of trout flies from the plumes of large feathers, it is a decided improvement to use two strands instead of one. The body will be much stronger, and if the strips are laid evenly, one upon the other, a nice rib may be shown. The large feathers of the wild Canada goose make very pretty bodies. I have found celluloid rather heavy and apt to break in winding on. I have made many inquiries for condor and adjutant feathers, but thus far have found none. My pet fly this season has a quill body, and I have been able to procure but few feathers suitable for it.

The dry fly gives delightful sport on these large mountain streams. The brown trout are found in very shallow water—sometimes in strong rifts, only a few inches in depth, and the greatest care is necessary to avoid a drag. The fly must be placed to an inch as the fish will rarely take it unless it floats over them just right. Occasionally a large trout will rise at a wet fly after refusing a floater, but usually dry fly is very deadly after the middle of May. The brown trout has at last gained a foothold in the Willowemoc, and will soon be in full possession. For many years great efforts were made by persons prejudiced against this fish to exclude it from this river, and they restocked only with native brook trout (*fontinalis*). I fancy that this was a mistake, and believe that the fishing will now be much more interesting. The average size of trout taken will certainly be much greater than heretofore. To my notion the fishing in all these streams is far and away beyond anything we enjoyed in the old days of native trout. A strong point in favour of the brown trout is its ability to thrive in water of fairly high temperature. Twenty years ago the water in these mountain rivers remained cool all summer, even in the lower reaches, but the destruction of timber and clearing of swamps have made a great change. Tributaries which were formerly never-failing streams of pure cold water now dry up entirely every summer.

I enclose one of the flies with which I have killed great numbers of trout this season. In order to get the best side of the wing feathers outside, I tie the double strips on concave side in; then split and se-

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

cure in position with the figure-of-eight whipping. The fly looks rather clumsy, but kills extremely well. It has two cock hackles to make it float well, and nothing could be better in that respect. I am quite confident that this fly would do well in some parts of the United Kingdom, of course, on hooks of a size suited to the water. The enclosed is tied on a No. 1 Hall's eyed hook. At this season of the year natural water-born flies are not numerous; the water is too warm for them to hatch out well. How different from old times! I can remember when there was a good show of fly on all these rivers in August. By going up nearer the sources a fair show of fly may be seen after sunset. Long ago I wrote you of a little lake near here which had been stocked with brown trout. It now holds many splendid fish, some of which are said to be more than 2 ft. long. Several years ago it was stocked with *fontinalis*, and now holds many of these trout of about ½ lb. each. It is strange that the brown trout reach such a great size, as there are no minnows in the lake. The fish seem to be entirely dependent upon flies and their larvac for food. I know that big brown trout will swallow the large "stick bait" (larva of a very large caddis fly), stick and all, for the sake of the fat and succulent grub they contain.

On a short stretch of free water four miles above this place, I killed fourteen good trout recently, returning nine fish, which were mostly above the legal or takable size. One afternoon near home, I caught seven trout and a ducking. I fell into a hole and got very wet, and, in spite of a quick return and change of clothing, caught cold—a very undesirable addition to my other catches. Have had what the old Southern Negroes call a "misery" ever since.

[It is very pleasant to hear our brown trout praised by such a good American angler as Mr. Theodore Gordon, and to find he kills them with first-rate dry flies of his own make. The fly he sends I have already referred to in the *Fishing Gazette*. I should think it would float better if the wing was divided and made V-shape; perhaps American trout are not so particular in having their artificial flies "cocked" as ours are—or are supposed to be—for I have scores of times killed trout which took the fly floating all on one side.—R. B. M.]



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

### FROM THE BEAVERKILL

F. S.  
AUGUST 25,  
1906

AT LAST WE are having real Sullivan County weather, cool, sunshiny days, and nights so cold that blankets are necessary for comfort. Day by day the river has dwindled in size, the water is clear as air and the trout are hidden away, or have voyaged upstream in search of cool water. Sport is very indifferent at this time on this portion of the stream, but conditions improve as one goes upward toward the source, and fair fishing can be had on some of the preserves, or on any free water that may be found here and there. Some of the farmers who have sold outright a strip of land on both banks running through their properties, find that they have parted with their chief asset, if at any time they wish to sell out in toto. Who cares for a farm through which runs a fine stream from which one is debarred? I should not feel that I owned the place at all. I can understand this parting with the river when a large compensation was received, but in some cases the price was very small. At one large house formerly patronized by many anglers and their families, I hear there are but three boarders this summer. In this instance parting with the fishing rights was simply suicidal. However, in the early part of the season, when the fishing is really good, a great deal of free fishing can be had in the lower reaches of the Beaverkill. Before making arrangements for board and rooms at any house, it will be advisable to make inquiries in regard to the extent of free water in the neighborhood. Hereabouts it is three or four miles. The largest native trout I have seen in Sullivan County in eight years, was killed on a small brook near this place last Saturday. It was in fine condition and measured fourteen inches. Many brown trout are taken of greater size than this, but even in the old days, when *fontinalis* was in full possession of the region and *fario* was unknown, a native trout weighing a pound was a big fish.

I have never been able to account for this satisfactorily. All these rivers are full of trout food, minnows abound, and after the fish reach a certain size, these are necessary, I think, to continue development. At least, it will be noticed that in some of the Maine lakes which contain no minnows, really big trout are never taken, while in the lakes

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

nearby where small fish swarm, enormous trout are occasionally killed. Many of the Maine lakes have been heavily stocked with smelt to provide food for the landlocked salmon which were introduced years ago. Of course the salmon were indigenous in some parts of Maine. I presume that after a forty-pound salmon, the greatest prize which an angler can desire is a ten-pound brook or river trout. Such a fish has always been a possibility in Maine and I believe that brown trout of this size are now in existence in streams within a hundred and fifty miles of the city of New York. The record is something over nine pounds (leaving out the extraordinary trout found several years ago in a tributary of the Beaverkill. This fish is said to have been over three feet in length, but owing to its poor condition only weighed fifteen pounds), and anyone who has viewed the Beaverkill below its junction with the Willowemoc, beyond Rockland, will agree with me that no water could be better fitted by nature to support big trout. This portion of the river affords good fishing early in the season, possibly at other times if one knows where the spring holes are.

On Saturday evening I toiled vainly for an hour or more, but mounting a small fly, the chubs or fallfish came to my rescue. When one can see these chubs rising and try for individual fish, the sport is just as good as trout fishing until after the chub is hooked. I imagine that I am casting over a fine trout and am only undeceived by the lubberly play of the silvery chub. In the end I did kill three good trout, in addition to the other fish. I believe that chub consume a large quantity of food which should go toward nourishing the trout. Therefore am in the habit of killing the big ones. Usually someone can be found who is fond of eating them. It is poor fun to kill anything which is perfectly useless as food. I have given split winged flies a good trial this season and sometimes find them killing. Occasionally they have a trick of spinning in the air on the back cast, particularly if tied spent-gnat fashion with wings laid on horizontally or almost flat on each side of the hook. It is quite delightful, however, to see a big fish come up and suck in one of these flies in the quietest, most confident way.

What one misses most in summer is the hatch of natural flies. If the water becomes heated by the sun, this ceases almost entirely and

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

if there are no natural flies, no rising trout will be seen. The prettiest of all sport to me is casting to a fish which is quietly taking in the real flies, particularly if I have reason to believe that it is a large trout. Light and accurate casting is necessary and I find that two or three strands of very fine gut on the end of the tapered leader are advantageous. With this one must be careful in striking, not to use too much force. There are few habits harder to overcome than that of hard striking. We have all seen small fish fairly yanked out of the water and maybe have done this ourselves. The smallest possible movement of the rod is required and it is not necessary to volley a rise with the rapidity which some people advocate. The action of the rod we use has much influence on striking, as with the old-fashioned willowy rod, quick action was necessary and a little too much force did no damage. With one of the powerful lightning-quick split bamboo rods of our best makers, a light hand is most desirable. Too much power in the strike will break the fine gut or leave a fly in the mouth of the trout. One day when I was particularly clumsy, I lost three flies in this way and probably added considerably to the shyness of three good trout. I wish that a knot could be devised for eyed hooks that would be entirely mechanical in the making. With small hooks and small eyes it is a perfect nuisance threading the eye and making the knot when the light is failing. Few men enjoy the strong keen sight of youth, yet eyed hooks have advantages over snelled hooks which are bringing them into use more and more as years go on. As far as my knowledge goes, what is called the "Turtle" knot is simplest and best. I have no confidence in the Pennell jam knot unless the gut used is coarse enough to fill or almost fill the eye of the hook.

With the water low and clear as air it is almost as pleasant to stroll along the river without a rod and view all that its depths reveal.

On Sunday afternoon I saw many interesting things. A fine school of large trout, for instance, gathered some yards out from the mouth of a small cold brook. At any other time these fish could not have been discovered, but the sun was high in the heavens, making every object distinctly visible. Two enormous chub were sailing about, but soon returned to the depths of the pool. Muskrats swam close along the

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

bottom for long distances, disappearing beneath piles of brushwood or old roots without making a ripple or coming up for breath. What kind of lungs have these beasts? It seems to be possible for them to remain under water as long as they wish. If it was not for the musky odor, I fancy that young rats would make interesting pets. Young raccoons are as funny as monkeys and much nicer in their habits. They are cleanly as possible and wash all their food. A young woodchuck is exactly like a tiny bear and infinitely diverting in its ways. All these animals when very small have slight fear of human beings. They begin feeding almost at once and are usually strong and healthy. Fear of man appears to be taught to young creatures by their parents and not to be instinctive as was formerly believed. A young but fully feathered swallow had no fear but would take flies freely from the hand shortly after meeting with an accident which impaired its power of flight.

### FROM THE BEAVERKILL

F. S.        AT LAST WE have had heavy rains to raise and cool  
SEPTEMBER 1, the streams. Day by day for two weeks the river  
1906        dwindled, clouds of dust rose from the roads and accompanied every passing vehicle, and for several days it was too hot to fish.

I do not object to low water if the weather is cool, as I have had fair sport under such conditions. For instance, we had delightful days and nights until Friday of last week, and the trout were active and on the feed. Of course, they were very shy. Small flies and finest gut were required, and a long cast upstream was absolutely necessary. With three figs in my pocket in lieu of dinner, I began work last Thursday, about 10:30 A. M., quite near the house, and enjoyed every minute of the day until 4:30 P. M. Where trout were not in evidence I caught big chub, which gave the same sport for a moment; in fact, they fooled me beautifully. One is quite sure that he has a fine trout until something queer in the play, or the glimpse of a silver side, undeceives him. Before returning home, I washed the slain in an ice-cold spring, then placed the chub in the basket first, with eight fine trout above. This, you must confess, was much the best arrangement. Would you

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

have shown the chubs on top? Why, man, you would have received credit for chubs only.

It pays to take a little pains with one's fish after they are reduced to possession. Coarse grass in the creel and an occasional sprinkling with cold water will keep trout bright and fresh-looking. I hate to see them turned out in a mass, mouths open and stiffened into deformed shapes.

Friday and Saturday were hopeless from an angler's point of view; but now conditions are different, and we may hope for a few first-rate days before the close of the season. Few men have much to complain of this year, if they have had time to go fishing.

I see that a writer in the *New York Sun* states that dry-fly fishing is unknown in this country, or, if known to a few, is not practiced successfully. He is quite mistaken. The dry fly has been used on many streams in the Middle States for years. It was not unknown to Uncle Thaddeus Norris, who wrote the "American Angler's Book" about 1863. He gives an instance of great success with dry fly on the Willowemoc, when wet fly was useless. In more recent years this method of fishing has been much resorted to by anglers of experience, where trout were shy and hard to take. The *Sun* man also says that no dry flies are tied in America. This is another error. I have seen beautiful work done by others, and tie all that I use myself. I have had a box of English dry flies for fifteen years, and used up some of them. I found out, however, that by following the colors of our own natural flies, which were on the water, I caught more trout, even when the work was rougher and less perfect to the eye. I believe that the entomology of American trout streams is much richer and more varied than anything known to fishermen in the United Kingdom.

English dry-fly anglers now often have a contempt for the wet fly, and seem to imagine that the only way to fish wet is with several flies cast downstream and dragging. This is absurd, as one constantly sees men casting upstream to rising fish. The only difference in method is that the fly is wet, not dry.

I admit that dry-fly fishing is most scientific, most difficult, particularly on such rivers as those in the south of England, or anywhere,

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

where the water is still and flows very slowly. Even with fine-drawn gut and tiny flies, the cast which falls light as a snow flake, or feather upon the bosom of a quiet pool, is hard to accomplish, and with a burning sun high in the heavens, the gut no matter how fine it may be, is very conspicuous.

On many of our trout streams we have heavy rises of natural flies in the early part of the season, but if we joined the cult of the dry fly purist and cast only to a rising trout at all seasons, we would have a dull time of it. Not only this, but we would miss some of the most delightful and truly scientific fishing of the year, when the water is very low and clear and when a dry fly is often most successful. Our methods of fishing must vary with the season and locality. We cannot adopt one style in this big country and practice it everywhere and all the time. Fishing dry early in the season, on a roaring torrent, would be love's labor lost indeed, and in many wild regions the fly must be used as a lure, not as an insect floating upon the water.

Personally, I would rather fish the old streams which have been known to anglers for generations, where the trout are hard to take and where there are many natural flies. Here, whether we fish wet or dry, some little time devoted to the study of entomology is not wasted, but adds greatly to our pleasure, and often to our success. In America we can find the kind of fishing we prefer. We can even find a good imitation of the English chalk stream, if we wish. There are several such that I know of, and probably others. Yet I imagine that all fly-fishers would enjoy and profit by a visit to the Test and Itchen. There, if one is lucky, he may see some of the great past masters of the dry fly at work, men who think, talk and breathe feathers, quills, hackles and perfect dry flies, who can drive twenty-five yards of heavy line in the teeth of a gale of wind and place a tiny dun or spinner, floating and cocked, a few inches above a rising trout. It must be confessed that this is the perfection of the art.

I wish that our small-mouth black bass was more of an insect feeder. I have not had the good fortune to find this fish rising freely in many localities where it was taken in numbers with bait. The big-mouth of the South rises freely to the proper flies, but it has not the

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

strength and endurance of its Northern cousin. I have killed small-mouth bass up to three pounds and a half with fly, and what a fight they put up! Imagine the sport these fish would afford if taken with small flies and fine tackle! Even a pond pickerel makes things quite lively on a fly-rod. Give him a big enough fly and pikey rises very freely. Probably the great maskanongé himself would rise at something gay and brilliant three or four inches long. I wish some one would try this where maskanongé are fairly abundant. I think an enlargement of a good pickerel fly would do the trick. It should be tried on the largest Pennell Limerick hook procurable with loop of wire or three-ply heavy gut, at head.

Trout fly-fishing is nearly over, and we must turn to other sports for recreation. Some men love the gun as well as the rod, yet shooting does not take the grip that fly-fishing does. Who ever heard of a man who lost his love of fishing in old age? The gun may be put away for all time, but not the rod and flies. It is raining again as I write, but I hope to have a good day on fine water far upstream before September 1.

### FROM THE BEAVERKILL

F. S.  
SEPTEMBER 8,  
1906

THE LAST DAYS of the trout season are slipping by with great rapidity, and from present indications, will be lost to the angler in this neighborhood. The river is discolored by heavy rain, and a gloomy sky, with heavy banks of clouds on the horizon, gives promise of another down-pour; in fact, I hear the pelting drops on the roof as I write. I confess I am a little disappointed. Yesterday I saw a magnificent trout which must have arrived on the high water last week, and hoped to try my hand at deluding it before the season closed. This fish is, I should say, full 22 inches long, and is one of those beautiful yellow trout. Many of the big, brown trout are very dark in color, probably from lying hidden much of the time, under rocks or in deep, dark pools. They are not nearly as handsome as the yellow variety; in fact, I have seen specimens of these which were as lovely as fish can be.

Last Thursday I journeyed up the river a long distance to visit a

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

friend who is located on a fine stretch of water nearly two miles in length. In this happy valley—at an elevation of more than 2,000 feet—he spends a month every summer, with trout at his door, and the voice of the hurrying river ever in his ears. It is a happy, carefree existence, a time of sport and recreation in the truest sense. Earlier in the week the stream had been high and roily, and one night it rose again without apparent cause. However, the water had become clear enough for good fly-fishing, and the trout were there and willing to be tempted. I was anxious to bring enough to give every one who is fond of trout a bit of fish for supper, and was able to do this in the last day and a half of fishing. Unless one is staying at a large hotel, it is very pleasant to be able to share one's spoils with all hands, but it is not often that this can be done late in the season.

The Beaverkill is certainly a wonderful trout river. For a distance of at least thirty miles it is perfectly adapted to the habits and tastes of these fish, and in good seasons they fairly swarm there. Once or twice in the past fifty years it has suffered greatly from tremendous freshets or floods, when there was heavy ice or ice jams in the river, but it soon recovered its ancient prestige, even before restocking from the State hatcheries made this comparatively easy and rapid.

Does any one of your readers know of a safe and sure method of exterminating pickerel in a small lake? It seems to me that I have heard of copper being used for this purpose, but am not sure. There is a small spring lake near here which is perfectly adapted to trout, and recently some thousands of small fish were introduced. Unfortunately, the lake was stocked with pickerel many years ago, and I do not think that trout can be established there until these sharks have been in some way eliminated. The black bass is the only fish that seems to be able and willing to knock out pickerel. The small-mouth will take root in a pickerel lake and after a time get the best of the long-nosed gentry. In some cases it has taken many years for them to do this, but in the end, if the water is suited to them, the bass comes out on top.

In virgin water the growth of fish is sometimes very remarkable. A little over two years ago a fine dam was built in such a way as to back



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

up the water, which came from a number of small springs, over a swamp, thus creating a pond of about twenty acres. A few thousand fingerling trout were then turned in, and this spring (1906) fish up to a pound and a half were caught. One of the men who fished this new water told me that on a very cold, unfavorable day he took forty fine trout out of it in a short time. I understand that this new lake is for sale, but it is a long distance from the railroad, twenty miles at least, I think. I only mention this to show what can be done by any one who has some waste land in which spring water can be found in any quantity.

I remember being told by an expert pisciculturist that with the water from a single spring near the Neversink he could hatch and raise to fingerlings, 500,000 trout per annum, a big crop from a little water.

### FROM THE BEAVERKILL

F. S.  
SEPTEMBER 15,  
1906

I AM SORRY for Yonkers, whose letter appears in *Forest and Stream* for Sept. 1; but his bad luck and disappointment were due to his carelessness and want of forethought. If he had written to *Forest and Stream*, or had consulted any one who had fished the Beaverkill, he would have learned that there is no trout fishing at Cook's Falls, except, possibly, for a short time early in the season, before the water becomes warm. The Beaverkill below its junction with the Willowemoc at Roscoe or Rockland is a river, with pools large enough for the biggest salmon, and right where the two streams join large trout are killed early in the season. It is a noble pool; but when I last visited it in the month of June, it was rather too late in the season for sport. However, we caught trout all the way down to the "Hatchery" above Rockland.

There is no trout fishing in the lower Beaverkill after June, except at spring holes. In July and August the angler must go up stream. He formerly had thirty miles of water at his disposal, but now there are several preserves, and he should make inquiries in regard to the fish-

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

ing before locating anywhere. Beaverkill P. O., where I am staying, is eight miles above Rockland, but in very hot weather the fishing is indifferent. The trout are hidden away mostly, although a few fine schools may be seen where cold brooks enter the river. Yonkers might have tried his hand on the big trout below the wooden bridge here. This fish can be seen any morning before he has been stared out of countenance by people on the bridge. This fish must weigh nearly four pounds, and is a bright, handsome specimen.

If Yonkers wants trout fishing in August, he must go where the water is cool, not way down stream near the Delaware River. He was near really first-rate black bass fishing, I believe. In July and August, if a man wants trout, he has to work for them. This is the case everywhere; but very fair fishing may be had in the upper reaches of many trout streams, particularly in the evening and early morning. Sport is apt to be poor when the summer sun is blazing down upon the water. It is hard to travel a long distance for a little fly-fishing and then have no success, but no one is to blame for Yonkers' disappointment, except himself. He appears to have taken a train to the first railroad station on the Beaverkill and expected to find good trout fishing on leaving the cars.

The good season of 1906 is past, and it is a long time until April 16, 1907. One thing we know is that there are lots of trout in the stream for breeding purposes. I fished three times in the last five days of the season. Once I came in from an attack on the life and liberty of the big trout below the bridge with nothing in hand except a regular buster of a chub. I did hook one very fine trout in the big pool, but when nearly exhausted, it rushed into the submerged branches of a small tree, which had come down in some freshet, wound the casting line in them, and pulled the hook out just when I thought he was mine.

I killed ten fine trout on Tuesday, but the last day of the season was not so satisfactory. I made a late start, several fishermen were in advance, and more sawdust was running than I ever saw in the Beaverkill before. It was not a blank day, however, as I basketed three brown trout and one *fontinalis*. The former were good fish, one of them weighing a pound. You see, I go on telling the fish stories which

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Yonkers complains of; but the good people who have eaten the fish do not complain—they are sorry that the season is over.

After my trip way up stream, I was able to give all hands a fish supper. The Beaverkill has been known to at least three generations of anglers as one of the best trout streams in the State of New York, and it would be hard to find anywhere a more beautiful one.

The past summer was unusually warm for this part of the country, and if we had not had heavy rain at intervals and occasional cool waves from the northwest, sport would have been poor indeed. If the temperature of the water rises above a certain degree, trout cease to feed and disappear in a puzzling way. No doubt some of them run up, but many remain, as they appear again in their old haunts after a few cool days and nights.

I have watched two trout in a long, shallow pool on one side of an island all summer. When the weather was very warm they were under the rocks and right on the bottom. At other times they were out in the stream, poised an inch or two above the gravel and small stones. These fish were in a very public place, and had been disturbed and angled for so much, that it was impossible, apparently, to take them by fair fishing.

The big trout below the bridge only came into the pool about two weeks ago, on a rise of water, and from its color must have been out in a sunny exposed place all summer. Probably it had begun to think of finding a mate to enjoy a honeymoon with. The lower portion of the bridge pool has shoaled a good deal; formerly it was much deeper, and several years ago there were four big trout in the same place near a flat rock. These large fish like plenty of water or, at least, a first-rate place to hide. Unless they have shelter where they are invisible, they are not safe from the poacher during low water.

In 1894 three trout, weighing  $2\frac{3}{4}$  to 5 pounds, were snared out of one pool on the Neversink by two farmers who were experts with the wire. I saw the men and two of the trout running as I passed up stream, but never dreamed that they could take the fish out of such a large body of water by snaring. The stream was very low and clear, and I learned afterward that there was no secure hiding place for the trout.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

The Big Indian 7-pounder lived in the same small pool for four years at least, but this trout had a hole in the abutment of a bridge into which he returned when disturbed, and out of which he could not be poked. At last a scoundrel shot the old fellow with a rifle. It was very amusing to watch the behavior of strangers when they caught sight of that trout. Some men would go wild with excitement and longing. They would put off for their rods, miles perhaps, and return in haste; they had little doubt of taking the great fish in a minute. If still in position when they returned, the first cast of fly or bait sent the shy monster to his den. In four or five years of residence, he was hooked four times.

### FROM THE BEAVERKILL

F. S.  
SEPTEMBER 29,  
1906

THE SUMMER IS past and gone, many of the birds have taken their departure, and the chill of early autumn is felt in the air. We feel that our good time is over, for this year, at least, and most of the city people have returned to their homes.

Even the big trout below the bridge grew tired of the attention it excited and has fled away up stream in search of more retired quarters.

The lie of this fish was vacant for about a week, then a smaller trout, of say 2½ pounds, appeared and selected a position a little lower down, by the same flat rock. Instead of two trout in the pig-pen pool, there are six or seven, the largest of which has been under a dock so long that it is quite as black as your hat. I believe that all these fish have been hidden in that shallow pool all summer. It is astonishing how trout can conceal themselves during the warm weather, and in exposed positions, where they are much disturbed.

There are two good spawning brooks in this neighborhood, and I am told that trout crowd into them in great numbers. I saw many of the Neversink fish at work upon their beds last November, and as they were not easily disturbed or frightened, was able to watch their proceedings with much interest. I do not think that any sensible person would kill a spawning trout, although I have heard of two or three very large fish being shot on the shallows at that season.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

How we miss the bird music of early summer! Now we hear nothing but the everlasting chip, chip, chip of that universal nuisance, the English sparrow. That belligerent little beast will soon pervade the whole earth. He was present with the Japanese army in Manchuria and quite enjoyed the bombardment of Port Arthur. What can one do with a bird which is not driven away or greatly disturbed by the roar of an 11-inch howitzer.

We never see the big hare here in summer, although ruffed grouse (partridge) and rabbits (the common American hare) are frequently noticed in the woods and on the roads. The hares keep back in the big woods near the evergreen swamps. They do not get their white coats until very cold weather; at least, I shot one last November that was just beginning to change.

In the *Forest and Stream* of Sept. 15 I read Mr. Charles Lose's "Young Angler's Complaint" with much sympathetic interest. I am not sure whether he is telling a story or relating facts. In the latter case, I fancy that the woes of the skilful but unfortunate youth may be greatly mitigated by close study of the cause of his misfortunes. There is a reason, I am quite sure. In a big, bold stream, such as is described, a few of the large fish hooked may be lost. Every one expects that—but not all, or nearly all. Sometimes poor hooks make trouble. When using very small flies I once lost four large trout through the hook's breaking; and again with larger flies, I lost three out of four in the same way. When trout are shy and take the fly gingerly, they are often hooked by a mere shred of skin; but when large trout rise in the bold way described by "Young Angler," a large proportion should be brought to hook. In at least three instances out of four I have found that the loss of a big trout was occasioned by my own carelessness, excitement or stupidity.

I remember one fine stream, almost a river, where for a time all the trout above a certain size broke away or were lost. The whole of these misfortunes, nearly, were caused by holding the fish hard. When I used 50 yards or more of line and let the trout go, following them as fast as possible, when they bolted down stream, I found that nearly all the big fish were landed, and other fishermen had the same experience. We have taken many trout from 18 to 22 inches long, not

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

on one occasion, of course, but I have lost very few of the large fish hooked. When they do rise, they often take a good grip of the fly. I am satisfied that many fish are lost through the use of badly shaped hooks. It seems difficult for the manufacturers to stick to a good form of hook when they do make it. They change its form or shorten the shank unduly. I have some good hooks now, but do not know how long I shall be able to get them. If I knew Charles Lose's address, I would send him a few; in fact, I would send him a few flies of the sort I am fond of using for big trout.

I cannot understand why so few really big trout were taken in the Beaverkill this season. There were lots of good fish, but I heard of very few being taken over  $1\frac{1}{2}$  pounds. Early in the season, in May and June, I killed three trout of  $2\frac{1}{4}$  to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  pounds, but these were not from the Beaverkill. There were some in the river, probably many of them. That fish below the bridge must have weighed nearly, if not quite, 4 pounds.

Winged flies are the favorites in this country, and are usually most successful. My pet fly during the past summer would not be nearly as attractive if dressed as a hackle. It is quite hard enough to see a small pattern in the evening now; without wings it would be almost invisible on the water.

I was surprised when I read Peter Flint's letter in a recent issue of *Forest and Stream*. All the species of trout with which I am acquainted will take minnows when they can get them, but there may be brooks where small, coarse fish are not found. In very small, cold streams minnows may, very possibly, not exist, or there may be very few of them. *Fontinalis* is often taken with small fish as bait. I'd like to know whether the great trout of the Rangeleys are ever seen midging or quietly sucking down the smallest possible flies. I remember that Genio C. Scott mentions taking several large fish at the Middle Dam with a couple of ash-midges, but this is the only record of the kind I have been able to find.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

### ENGLISH PROGENITORS OF AMERICAN ARTIFICIAL FLIES

F. G.  
OCTOBER 13,  
1906

THE ORIGINAL PATTERNS from which the Beaverkill fly, so called, originated were brought from England about forty years ago, and, I fancy, must have been imitations of sedge flies. There are two

flies named Beaverkill.

No. 1.—Wings: dun, light or dark; hackle: brown, head to tail; body: white silk; tail: brown mallard.

No. 2.—Wings: curlew (brown); hackle: brown, shoulder only; body: white silk, ribbed flat gold; tail: usually none, sometimes brown or grey mallard.

I think that No. 1 is decidedly the most killing, but No. 2 is said to be nearest the original pattern, which probably had land-rail wings, curlew being a good substitute. If this original was hackled down the body, there is little doubt that it was the Silver Sedge.

I have tried to tie two small Beaverkills, dry-fly fashion, to see what they would look like, but I have broken my eye-glasses and cannot see what I am about. However, they may give you some notion as to the reasonableness of my idea that the Beaverkill is descended from your Sedge. No doubt a number of our patterns of artificial flies were "created" in this way.

The fat specimen of my pet quill sent to you some time ago had split wings all right, although the concave side was turned in to show the best side of the feather. Probably the fly was smashed flat in the letter.

The wings of a Dun are really more natural when not split, and if the hackles are put on right the fly will be found to cock well. The influence of the split wing in very small flies is much less than is usually supposed.

One of these days I must send you all our best stream flies that really amount to anything, tied small enough to try dry over English trout. It would be interesting as an experiment.

Why is it that most of the English split-cane rods are so limber,

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

have such a soft, floppy feeling, in spite of their weight and large diameter? If one of our best makers was to copy my old English rod exactly, in the bamboo used over here, he could turn out a rod as stiff as a poker and almost, if not quite, strong enough to kill a tarpon on.

I have puzzled my brains over the argument that greenheart is stiffer than split-cane for some time past, and think that this is the solution of the puzzle. The cane or bamboo used in England by the best makers is very strong and durable, stronger, perhaps, than the material we use, but it is not nearly as stiff and springy. Copy a greenheart salmon rod in good bamboo and you will have an infinitely stiffer, more powerful rod. Many Americans prefer first-rate Cuban lancewood to greenheart for wood fly rods. They think that it has more snap to it. This is true in one sense, as, unless the grain is very straight, lancewood tips are easily broken. I believe that our preference for a particular material or action in rods is largely a matter of habit. One friend of mine, who makes his own split-cane rods, likes all the action in the upper part of the weapons he turns out. The tips, or tops, are very thin. In fact, he carries this to such an extreme that they are quite easily broken. He induced me to try a new rod of his, the lightest he had ever made. It would carry only a very fine line, and in my hands was no use against wind nor for long casts. It put my hand out so that my 6-oz. "Leonard" felt like a weaver's beam, and it was some time before I could get back to easy casting with it. A very light rod, if used for a few days, will spoil your pleasure in using a rod that you have sworn by for years. Our season closed on Sept. 1; no more fly-fishing until April 16, 1907. There are only about twenty people here now, and my mother and I will soon go to the Hall House, at Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y. Beaverkill, New York.

[There is no doubt whatever, as anyone can prove who studies that fine American work, Mrs. Marbury's "Favourite Flies," that a large number of the artificial flies in use in the United States are really descendants of good old English stock. This is well borne out by the foregoing letter from Mr. Theodore Gordon. The Beaverkill is evidently our Silver Sedge—they are rarely used in this coun-



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

try dressed as these are on Hall's o and double o eyed hooks, but they might well be, for they are very taking little chaps. As regards rods, Mr. Gordon seems to have got hold of a very whippy English rod; they are made here now as stiff and as light as in America, at least, as regards trout rods—and salmon rods can be made equally stiff and light when our anglers find out that heavy salmon rods are no more necessary than heavy trout rods.—R. B. M.]

### FROM THE BEAVERKILL

F. S.  
OCTOBER 20,  
1906

THE HABITS OF trout appear to vary a good deal; some are home lovers and may be seen day after day in the same place; others are fond of travel. They come up from below on a push of water, remain a short time in the big pool and pass on up stream. There are not many places where the trout can be observed at all times, but it is very instructive to follow their movements where it is possible to do so. For one thing we learn how necessary it is to fish a long piece of water thoroughly, not skipping even the shallow sides and unlikely places. The fish may be anywhere in the pool, and the largest of all may be on the lookout for minnows or other food in dead water only a few inches deep. Again they are lying in the center, or at the tail of the pool, or in the swift water at the upper end. They may be hidden under rocks, or, in hot weather, lying like dead things on the bottom, scarcely moving gills or fins. In the last position they are sometimes indifferent to everything about them, and may be approached within a few feet. I have actually touched several with a stick before they darted away. They appear to be asleep, or in a trance or comatose state.

Sometimes a big fish will cruise along the edges on the shallows. They may be too lazy to catch the minnows, but are satisfied when they have frightened them nearly out of their wits. The last time I saw a trout doing this, it followed the minnows into water only two or three inches deep, yet made no real effort to catch one. I know from previous observations that it could have taken them if it was hungry and in earnest.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

Judging by these notes made from the high bank of a long pool of no great depth, I should say that on a stream fairly well stocked with trout, it is scarcely possible to fish too slow or to be too careful to keep out of sight of the sharp eyes of the trout. I have seen men wading where they should be casting their flies. Nothing spoils sport for the angler who comes after one like deep wading. This is one reason why we would rather fish after a good fly-fisher than a man who is using bait. The latter is apt to wade deeper and alarm the trout more. It is of no use to fish for trout on the surface when they are hidden away under rocks and in the deepest holes. The only thing to do is to sit down, smoke a pipe and take it easy for at least half an hour. The larger the stream the sooner the trout recover from their fright. I sat on a rock near the Neversink, on one occasion, and allowed nine men to pass me. They were all in a hurry to take the stream first, and I had gone out to fish, not to run a footrace over rocks and through the water. After a good rest, I fished after the progressive ones, going very slowly, and had quite a satisfactory day of it. On a small brook the probabilities are that I would have caught nothing, except a few baby trout.

The past summer in Sullivan County has been the warmest I have ever known, and the humidity has been much greater than usual. Possibly some scientist may be able to tell us why the prevailing winds have been from the southeast instead of from the northwest. Southerly winds are favorable to the fly-fisher in this section as long as the water is reasonably cool, but there is nothing I hate so much as lukewarm water in a trout stream. However, we must take the rough with the smooth, and be thankful when we can be anywhere near water in which there is a possibility of finding a rising trout.

After all, it is largely a question of size and shyness. I have been happier over the capture of three large trout than I would have been with a basketful of small fish.

When we are obliged to use small flies and fine gut, the fishing is more interesting and exciting. Some years ago I read the autobiography of an old angler who had never used a gaff or net in landing salmon. He considered it unsportsmanlike to mar the beauty of the

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

fish; but he must have lost many that were lightly hooked, in playing them to the point of exhaustion before stranding or taking them out by gripping just above the tail. He wore a lisle thread glove to give a better hold. It would not be possible to take trout by the tail grip, as they are not formed in the same way as the salmon; but where it is possible to do so, I find it more exciting not to use a net. One may have to take a large fish a long distance down stream to find a suitable place to land it, and it is certainly exasperating to lose a big one that a net would surely have saved.

In my experience no fish is more dangerous than a lazy one. Some of these beggars come right along or swing in to your side of the stream up into shallow water, then bear slowly and heavily away. They do not really tire, and may be galvanized into sudden life and action at the last moment. However, there were not many poky trout this season. Most of them rushed up stream the instant they felt the hook and fought desperately until completely played out.

I am surprised that more women do not go fishing. I find that, given the opportunity, many women are interested in the sport, particularly in fly-fishing. In fact, they are enthusiasts when they do take to it. Casting from a boat or canoe is easiest, but a woman can wade, if she wants to, just as well as a man. The best chum I ever had in fishing was a girl, and she tramped just as hard and fished quite as patiently as any man I ever knew.



## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

### AN AMERICAN ANGLER ON DRY FLIES, ETC.

F. G.  
DECEMBER 22, 1906 I WONDER IF the dove-wing feathers would be good colour in imitating your blue-winged Olives. I enclose a fly that I fancy may be akin to that fly (with dove wing). In regard to artificial flies cocking well, I find that the length of the hackle has a great deal to do with it. If I can find good hackles which are short enough in fibre there is no difficulty in making the fly sit up on the water. A very large proportion of the flies dressed have hackles far too long to look right or cock readily.

Some of the most beautiful dry flies I have ever seen from England have been big flies on small hooks, and surely when three or more long hackles are put upon a small hook the angler must miss more rises than he should? Don't you miss a lot of trout when fishing those large Mayflies on small hooks?

English anglers seem to like blued hooks. I remember that Mr. Halford expresses a preference for them, and, recently, I found a lot of beautifully tied dry flies, by one of the best dressers, which were all on blued hooks, except a few large sedges, which were on bronzed.

To my notion the blued are very inferior. They are more conspicuous, I think, in the water, and rust if the least moisture gets into the fly-box.

Have you ever noticed how much more rapidly the eye becomes educated than the hand? The eye tells one just what the artificial fly should be, but the hand is slow in following the behest of the eye. If really first-rate materials are at hand, it is not so bad; one can then produce something nearer his ideal. I bought a new pair of eye-glasses not long ago, and was disgusted with a lot of flies that had satisfied me quite well when using glasses a trifle weaker in magnifying power.

I saw a very fine white-tailed buck a few days after he had been killed. It weighed 205 lb., and was sold at from 60 cents to 75 cents per pound. It has been a good season for ruffed grouse, and there was a heavy flight of woodcock in October. I had an amusing experience one afternoon with a green pointer puppy, which picked me up in the street. She sneaked up behind me, and got a sniff at the pockets of my old shooting-coat. The animal had the hunting instinct strongly de-

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

veloped, but was entirely untrained. I think she would have chased the first grouse she flushed into the next county, if she could have kept it in sight. Later, she flushed three more, and we had a little serious conversation together. I never saw a puppy more intelligent, and with her assistance I bagged two of those wild birds. They are apt to run a good deal, and are trying birds for a young dog to work upon. I wish that you could have seen the magnificent views from the high ridge I was shooting on that afternoon.

[The dry-fly Mr. Gordon sends dressed with "dove" wing is as good a bit of fly-dressing as one need wish to see. The dove wing makes a lovely blue-winged fly—it must be a smaller and more delicate bird than our dove; just as the American partridge is much smaller than ours. No doubt a lot of trout are missed every Mayfly season, and it is a good thing they are, whatever the cause may be, or our rivers would get depleted. Personally, for small trout flies I rather like the blue steel hook, though it does rust quickly; next I prefer the black japanned hook, and the brassy bronze colour I like least of all. Yes, I have noticed that the eye can beat the hand every time! If I could only do things as my eye wants them done! It is curious, too, how the hand will go on doing a thing mechanically long after it ought to be doing it quite a different way. For twenty years I was in the habit of writing a certain address of a business firm many times a week. Ten years ago they changed their address, and yet my hand still, nine times out of a dozen, goes on writing the old address, until the eye pulls me up in the middle of it. I hope Mr. Gordon will have a good 1907 fishing season, and wish some of it could be on our dry-fly waters.—J. B. M.]

## AMERICAN NOTES

F. G.  
JANUARY 19,  
1907

A RECENT communication to the *Fishing Gazette*, as I remember it, was not favourable to pumping as employed in America when playing heavy fish. I wish I had known something of this method years ago when trying conclusions with a species of devil-fish in our southern waters. This beast was hooked at about eleven o'clock in the morning and was not landed until half-past five in the afternoon. It towed two

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

boats and three men several miles, and when it wished to rest, sulked on the bottom, its great wings or flaps seeming to act as suckers. I have no doubt that an expert on tarpon, tuna, or black sea bass would have killed this fish in half the time or less, and that pumping would have been a great help, but I knew nothing about it. At that time very little was known of the science of playing huge fish on comparatively light rods and tackle.

I see a good many common American hares, or rabbits, but very few specimens of the big varying hare, which dons a coat of pure white in winter. I love to tramp in the woods and brush after fresh snow has fallen. It is very interesting to follow the prints of small furry feet, although we rarely view the animals themselves. They are fond of moonlight strolls and early-morning constitutionals.

I fear that weather conditions have not been favourable to the trout streams. The climate has changed in some respects, and the heavy snowfalls are late in coming. Formerly snow fell to a depth of two feet or more in November, and protected the ground all winter, now we have very cold weather first, the earth freezes to a considerable depth, and when it rains or thaws later all the water runs off quickly, instead of soaking into the ground. Much of the snow goes off in the same way, and but little water is stored up to help the springs and brooks in summer. We may have a break up of the ice and heavy flood if the rain continues.

I see few wood fly rods in use, lancewood (Cuban) or bethabara seems to be preferred to greenheart in America. There is a very handsome material called noib wood, which may be the same as what is called African greenheart. It makes good tarpon rods.

I wonder what grape-vine cane is? I have seen fly rods of this material advertised as being good and durable, and the price was very moderate. The word grape-vine suggests anything but a good material for a rod. One of the sweetest casting rods I ever handled was made by a relation of mine, out of two old wood joints and a split-bamboo tip. As long ago as 1860 Thaddeus Norris advised ash for the butt, iron wood for the second joint, and split-cane for the top, and the

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

rods made by him were celebrated for their good qualities. They were usually about 12 feet in length and weighed seven to eight ounces. These rods would be rather too whippy for dry-fly fishing, but they could be used with thin lines for delicate casting. A good point in them was that the hold of the hook was well maintained in the mouth of the trout, even when a mere shred of skin was held.

Uncle Thad's favourite flies were the Brown Hen or Chantrey, Coachman, with wings of various shades from pure white to dark lead colour, and ginger, red and black hackles. He was very fond of peacock herl bodies. When salmon fishing he used the Brown Hen, enlarged, for low water, and the Nicholson, Blue and Brown or Fiery Brown, three names for the same fly. For high water the fly was the Silver Grey. I do not think that he used a larger hook than No. 1 in any stage of water in the Nipissiguit or Mirimashi rivers.

There seems to be a constant tendency towards the elaboration of flies, increasing the dressing. I suppose that this has always been the case, and wonder if they kill any better than in the original patterns as devised by the inventors. Jock Scott has suffered little change, but the various patterns of the Silver Doctor are wondrous to behold. Small salmon flies are used a great deal in Maine nowadays, and some of the old trout flies are not as simple as they used to be.

It seems strange that the trout do not object to the vast profusion of legs put upon floating flies—I think that they do, sometimes. It seems absurd to put a hundred legs on an insect that has only six, in Nature's garb. Of course, if we are using large flies as lures, that is another matter, as the probabilities are that they are not taken as flies at all, simply because the colours are attractive, and they appear to be endowed with life.

In a few years, I presume, we shall have no free fishing at all in this country. The Government of New Zealand has been very wise in reserving a strip on each bank of the streams and rivers, so that the people may never be debarred from access to them. There will be trout fishing for everyone and for all time. If no unfair advantage is taken of the fish, the streams will never be depleted, although a little

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

fresh blood from the hatcheries may be advisable occasionally. The best fishing we have, in New York and Pennsylvania, is due to the State hatcheries, which introduced the brown trout into so many of the streams. *Fontinalis* is a beauty, but I love *fario* quite as well. What a wily fellow the latter is when he has arrived at what may be called middle age. The tricks he will play and the rocks he will dive under. The last big fellow that fooled me rushed off down stream when he felt the hook. The pool was very large, and I did not know of any obstructions in that part of it. However, that trout knew better. There was a nice little waterlogged tree on the bottom, about five feet long, and when the old rascal was tired of playing with me he tied the line neatly to one of the branches. He was too weak by that time to break away, but when I plunged in, dived down and dragged up the tree, he braced up and broke the hold of the hook; I saw him swimming slowly away. The old wretch! I gave him quite a scare, anyhow.

I never understood why so many people object to the country, particularly in winter. To me it is always more cheerful than a big city. Can anything be more dismal than London or New York during the short days of winter? The light is cold and hard; even if the sun is shining one cannot see it. The only things to do in town are to labour hard and spend a lot of cash which one has made with difficulty. Country pleasures cost nothing, and even in a village one can soon get outside and draw a few breaths of uncontaminated air. You can climb a hill and gaze over many miles of woods and clearings, little lakes and streams, all dressed in white. You can find a good many small birds that winter here, and occasionally something larger. For a little while, at least, you feel as free as air, and that is what all men long for, whether they know it or not. There is precious little real freedom in the world, and the city dweller has none at all. Perhaps I am something like an Indian in my tastes. Many young countrymen crowd to the cities, but this is because they work hard for poor returns, and hope to better themselves. It is very unfortunate that farming is such an unprofitable pursuit in many parts of the country. The yeomen are the backbone of the nation.



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

I intend to try a new method of filing materials for fly making, invented by a kindly correspondent of the *Fishing Gazette*. This is quite a problem, particularly when one's ambition is to be able to tie any fly that we may see or have the pattern of. Once upon a time I thought that I was in this proud position, and my friends very kindly tried to take me down a peg or two. They brought me some queer bugs to copy—one of them had legs of black thread and bead eyes; another was sent to me that was said to be too much for anybody, and was valued at fifty cents for any number of him that could be tied. It was a long time before I found out where the difficulty lay. We never (or hardly ever) see the giant grouse of Norway and Sweden in this country, and the wings of this fly were made from feathers taken from that big bird. Then the hackle was not really a hackle, it was one of the body feathers of the golden pheasant used as a hackle. Fly making is a bother, but it is also a great pleasure. I wish that I could find an old-fashioned cpaulet. I had a piece of one which served me well, but I used the last wire from it about a year ago. Fly making gives us a new sense almost. We are constantly on the lookout, and view everything with an added interest. Possibly we may turn it into a bug of some kind.

A wandering angler in this country has to carry quite a large assortment of flies, and I presume it is the same in the United Kingdom. When the trout are taking badly the question of the correct fly is a tough proposition. We change and change, and it is only now and then that we are rewarded for our trouble. But what a satisfaction it is to kill a few good trout under adverse conditions, and when our neighbours on the stream are doing nothing. Our bump of self-esteem is greatly enlarged. When the other fellow turns the trick it is hard to look pleasant and tender our congratulations. I have cast my flies fruitlessly while another angler half filled his basket.

A great deal of spinning with natural or artificial baits appears to be done in some portions of Great Britain, and I wonder that this practice does not injure the streams for fly-fishing. A fly-fisher has a poor show for sport if he has to fish after an enthusiastic spinner. The trout that are not caught are pricked or badly frightened for hours,

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

more particularly in low, clear water. A friend and myself tried some experiments in this line one lovely day in June of 1906. He spun a natural minnow and fished wet fly, while I used the dry fly nearly all day. I did not see a rise on water that had been spun over, nor did I have a rise at my fly when I fished on spec. This remained true hours later when we were returning down stream. If my companion covered the water thoroughly with wet fly, I had a chance afterwards, but this was not the case where he used minnow. The experience of one day may be insufficient to draw conclusions from. I have been tempted to try spinning on a large stream with which I am familiar, but feared that if I succeeded in killing a few big fish in that way the practice would become general among the natives, and the water would be spun to death.

I hope to have some really first-rate black bass fishing next season, and that the fish may be amenable to the attractions of the artificial fly. I have been successful in some waters, while in others it was only occasionally that a bass of fair size could be taken with fly. In one locality I had a curious experience. There were only a few flies that the bass would take at all, and only one which was super-excellent. If I changed the colour of the body of this fly, to red, for instance, it was almost worthless. I do not think that the artificial was taken because it resembled a fly but because it was like some other food. I did not see any natural flies on the water, and the regular diet of these bass seemed to consist of small minnows and crayfish. Of course, the sport was not equal to fly-fishing for trout, but the great numbers of bass taken and the way they fought made it very exciting. Although I saw no natural flies, I did see the fish rise here and there, and a cast near the spot was nearly always rewarded with success.



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### LITTLE TALKS ABOUT FLY-FISHING

F. S.  
JANUARY 19,  
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MEN WHO ARE not members of the great fraternity of anglers have no idea of the pleasure they have missed and are missing; of the savor and sweetness which a love of fishing, and particularly fly-fishing, adds to life on this old planet. Those who can say with Fishin' Jimmy, "I allers loved fishin' and knowed it was the best thing on the hull earth," are fortunate. It is not necessary, however, for a man to begin practicing the gentle art early in life; business, the practice of one of the professions, or location, may prevent many from going fishing until quite late in life. Sir Humphrey Davy was fifty years old before he took up his rod, yet he became a celebrated angler and wrote "Salmonia."

One stores up many happy memories for all time. The incidents of past seasons rise before his mental sight on gloomy wintry days, and with the beginning of a new year he thinks of the joyful days to come, when he can snap the shackles which bind him and fly away to his favorite trout stream. Then there is so much pleasure to be had out of the accessories of the art, the rod, reel and line, the beautiful artificial flies and filmy casting lines or leaders. If he is a moderately patient man and is gifted with a little mechanical ability, he may make most of these things himself. Many amateurs tie lovely flies, and some of the finest rods I have seen have been made by them. Where there was one fly-fisher fifty years ago, there are now a hundred, and we cannot fail to note the growing interest in the sport. Many books on angling have been written in recent years and none that I know of have failed to find readers.

Some people say that nothing can be learned from books, but I think this is quite a mistake. Practice is absolutely necessary, of course, but we gain many valuable hints in our reading as well as in conversation with anglers of experience. As an instance of this, many years ago I saw in a work on angling an illustration of a fly-fisher casting his fly, and this picture had great value for me. I had been, up to that time, rather a laborious wielder of the fly-rod. Frequently my arm ached so badly after a long day's work, or after several consecutive days on the

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stream, that my sleep was not sound or restful. I gained something from that illustration; I cannot say now just what it was, but I do know that from that time on fly-fishing has been more pleasurable and less fatiguing. The rod seems to do the work in ordinary stream fishing without conscious effort on my part and only the grasp of the hand is cramped or uncomfortable at the end of the day.

Again, I was fishing a large stream after a heavy freshet. The water had subsided considerably, yet the trout seemed to have remained in numbers in certain sheltered places. They were rising steadily under the bank of a long curving pool, but nothing I could offer them seemed to their taste. I could not see what they were taking until I went up stream and waded across. Then I found that a flight of ants was on, as it was in August. Why or how they got on the water I did not stop to consider, but went through my fly-book looking for an artificial ant. I found none and for a time was at a loose end. Suddenly I remembered having read somewhere that a small lead winged coachman would kill when ants were on the water, and soon found three of these insects on No. 12 hooks. To my notion they were not much like ants, but the trout welcomed them gladly and I killed in that long pool either twenty-two or twenty-eight good trout, I forget which. I found out afterward that I was indebted to that veteran angler, H. R. Francis (not F. F.) for this hint, and it was not intended for American anglers either.

I believe strongly in the purchase of a really first-class rod. If you are a beginner and think yourself clumsy or nervous, buy a cheap rod to begin with. Smash it in your early efforts to catch fish and then get the best rod you can afford to buy. A really first-rate weapon will do practically all the work in casting the length of line usually required, and is a source of constant pleasure to its possessor. There are some rods that one loves to cast with, even when there are no fish. It is best to have water to practice on, but a lawn or open field is good enough. You can get the idea of how to cast in a room, with a switch and a piece of string. Use the wrist in short casts and keep the elbow down near the side. In the back cast never allow the point of the rod to go much beyond the perpendicular. It is the spring of the rod and the

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wrist that do the trick. It is only in long casts that the whole arm comes into play. Make the rod spring with the wrist; don't just wave it to and fro. Begin with a short line, not much longer than the rod—the longer the line the more difficult it is to allow the correct time before coming forward.

One great advantage of the moderate split bamboo rod is its quick, snappy action. The old-fashioned rod was comparatively slow and soft. One had to allow more time behind. Some people call casting the fly-whipping, and there is some analogy between the fly-rod and a whip with a short stock and very long lash. I fancy that a good driver of oxen would use his wrist largely in neatly clipping a piece of hide out of one of the leaders, and we have all heard the story of the stage coachman who was so expert that he could twitch the pipe from between the lips of passing pedestrians with his whip lash as he drove by. It is not difficult to learn how to cast well enough to kill a few trout. After this your fate is sealed. You will never be able to drop angling, as you may some other sports, even if you have not time to become very expert. In the beginning try to acquire a good style. A high back cast is most important. Never allow the fly to touch ground or water behind you. A great many people throw the points of their rods too far back in casting and then wonder why so many hooks are broken and flies ruined. I have known men who could cast a long distance and who were quite successful in killing trout, who never got over this habit of smashing flies. It is ugly work and it is very expensive.

Good single-action click reels can now be bought for much less money than a few years ago. Steel springs and ratchets are most important. If you are to have but one reel, buy one that will carry fifty yards of the line which suits your rod. A stiff rod requires a heavier line than a more pliable one to bring its full power into play, but I find it easier to cast lightly with a thin line than with one of large diameter. In actual fishing it is not often essential to throw a very long line. Braided waterproof silk is what we ask for, and nowadays we usually find just what we want, or very near it, at the shops. Formerly I used an E double tapered line, but an F or even G level line is good enough for stream fishing.

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As for flies, their name is legion and new patterns are constantly being added to the lengthy list. A wandering angler who casts his line in many waters requires a large stock of flies, as he must be prepared to vary the size as well as the colors. He must have the gay and gorgeous, as well as the modest and subdued. Midges and imitations of the natural flies may kill best in one place, the fanciest of fancy lures in another. The man who haunts one stream or locality has comparatively little trouble. He soon learns the colors and sizes which suit the water and may get through his season without using more than half a dozen patterns in two sizes. If he is an entomologist, he will want quite a variety in size and color, and perhaps several shades of the same color in the flies he deems best. This man, I think, gets rather more out of his sport than the unbeliever who scoffs at his theories. He is constantly on the lookout for natural flies and deeply interested in their transformations, which are truly wonderful. He is only at sea when he visits regions where lures are killing and his small imitations of little value.

I have almost overlooked one of the necessities, the leader, of silk-worm gut. This should usually be about nine feet in length and stout or fine as required to meet the conditions of the waters fished and the size and shyness of the fish. I usually make up my own, beginning with moderately thick gut next the line and tapering to the finest point I think it advisable to use. We can buy finer natural gut than formerly, if willing to pay the price asked for it, but are still occasionally driven to this drawn gut for shy fish, when the water is low and clear. This is gut which has been drawn through diamond or steel plates to reduce the size and make the lengths of even thickness throughout. It is said that many years ago gut was not bleached and could be had clear and colorless as glass. The chemicals used in bleaching make it white and opaque, and much more conspicuous in the water. It is claimed also that bleaching detracts from the strength of the gut and makes staining necessary. From time to time we have been led to hope that good gut in long strands would be produced from one of the large American silkworms, but nothing practical has yet been accomplished. I have seen a strand six feet in length, but it was not of good quality.

Horsehair still has its advocates in some parts of England, the

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dales of Yorkshire, for instance. There four small flies on hooks tied on hair and with single hair casts, are used by old-fashioned anglers. They claim hair falls straight and lightly on the water, that the droppers stand out better from the cast, and that it is less conspicuous than gut. They may be able to get better hair than we can procure in this country, but from my own experience I should say let hair alone; it is a delusion and a snare.

Drawn gut can be had of any fineness desired, as fine as a lovely woman's hair. It is graded and numbered by the letter X, X being heaviest and XXXXXX the finest made. Sometimes the thickest grades are known as  $\frac{1}{2}$  and  $\frac{1}{4}$  drawn. The finest natural is known as refina and occasionally we are able to buy a hank in long, round strands, which are fine enough for the lowest water and shyest fish. Common gut can be had in abundance at a low price, but the heaviest salmon and finest trout are expensive, the former particularly so; in fact, one seldom sees a leader made from imperial salmon gut.

Much pleasure will be found in buying rods and tackle. If inexperienced, any old angler will rather enjoy helping you out, or you can go to a first-class shop, ask for a salesman who is an angler and tell him where you propose to fish. If economy is an object to you, very fair working tools for angling can be had for little money. I do not consider weight in the scales of great importance, as I like a good-sized comfortable handle. It is the weight outboard from the hand that tells. One of the lightest rods I ever saw weighed eight ounces on the scales. It had a big, fat wooden handle and substantial fittings, but the rod proper was very light. My individual preference is for a rod of ten feet, but lots of men prefer something shorter. I have seen good work done with an eight-foot rod, but there is a great difference in the power of rods of the same length. A tall strong man can handle a rod of great power, and with a suitable line bring out all there is in it. He may be able to do this all day long without great fatigue, while a weaker person would be heavily handicapped and tired to death.

Dry fly-fishing is more fatiguing than ordinary wet-fly work, but at times and on some waters it has advantages and will kill more trout. It is quite essential in this fishing that the fly should be cast in such

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a way that it falls of its own weight, otherwise it is apt to drop on its side, with wings flat upon the water. In this position it is not nearly so attractive, particularly to shy fish. To do this, direct your fly at an imaginary mark about two feet above the level of the water. It is not hard to accomplish this with a moderate length of line, but where a very long cast is a necessity, one must just do his best to reach the spot by carrying his hand high in the air and bringing the whole arm into play. As I said before, one can get a very good idea of how to use the wrist in casting with a stiff, spring switch, and a piece of string, or fine line, two or three times the length of this impromptu rod. If most of one's fishing is done in small brooks where few large trout are found, a very light, short rod will give more pleasure than a more powerful weapon, and is more convenient to use among trees and bushes. I have seen some pretty work done with an eight-foot rod, but personally I would never choose anything under nine feet and five ounces in weight. A well-shaped handle of cork is a great comfort. Those tiny little handgrasps are, to my notion, much more tiring to the hand.

If we can afford a battery of rods, the first selection is not of so much importance, but if we can have but one it should be, in our eyes, as near perfection as possible. Even the man of many weapons will be apt to have one prime favorite which he uses at all times and in all places.

It usually pays to fish upstream in small brooks and in the large streams when they are low and clear. Early in the season when the water is high the best results will often be obtained by fishing across and down. One may cast his flies over the same place many times and then get a rise. In a fair current it may be best to almost hang the flies over the trout; at this season they are often slow to rise. I cast over a fish that was catching minnows for half an hour or more from a point about opposite and it paid no attention to the fly. I then went above, and getting out a long line, fairly hung the fly over the fish. This was a large trout (three pounds), as I had supposed, literally crammed with fresh silvery minnows.

When writing of sport one could fill a book with stories of personal experiences. All the big fish one has taken rise and plead for



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recognition. The small chaps are forgotten, although they have contributed largely to our pleasure in days past. Fly-fishing is more interesting where we know a few really big fish exist. They may be slow to rise, but give them a fair chance; they will take a fly occasionally. Too many of them are shot, speared, snared or taken with baits of one sort or another. A large fly will sometimes tempt them when they would disdain a good imitation of the natural fly in the water.

If you know where a real Jumbo lives, be sure that your tackle is of the kind to give you a chance of killing him. There is no knowing what he may rise at, but see that your casting line and fly are in good condition. Don't use gossamer gut even with a very small fly. I did that myself and had good reason to regret it. (Great Scott! you should have seen that trout.) These trout are occasionally in shallow water early in the morning. The evening is a good time to try for them in warm weather. A good many anglers have regretted not having fish of unusual size mounted. It is certainly a great pleasure to have a trophy or trophies of that description to hang on one's wall.

In the streams of the Middle States flies of sombre colors are usually successful. Duns of sorts are favorites with me. All the ephemera pass through the dun stage before reaching maturity. The natural flies and larvae that form a considerable portion of the trout's food belong mostly to the ephemeridæ, trichoptera (caddis), perlidæ (stone flies), and diptera (gnats). All, or nearly all, of these flies are born of the water and pass the greater portion of their lives in it as immature and undeveloped insects. While not absolutely essential to success, some little time spent in the study of these insects, their habits and metamorphosis, will be found very interesting to any one who wanders, rod in hand, by the sides of our beautiful trout streams. No one seems to know a great deal about them, yet the larvae fairly swarm in some waters, and during May and June they often hatch out in great numbers upon the surface. Some of them have a bad habit of coming out at night, but a great many are day flies. The species seem to vary a good deal even on streams that are not many miles asunder. A fly may be very abundant on one river and be practically unknown on another. I fancy that they are not as abundant on the waters with

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which I am familiar as they were years ago. The water gets much too warm for them in summer, in streams that formerly remained quite cool throughout the year. Some day they will, probably, be closely observed, but it is very difficult to preserve specimens in any similitude of life. The ephemera are particularly fragile.

Doubtless the reason why artificial flies were originally invented was because it was impossible to use the smaller and more delicate natural flies as baits on the hook. The first fly-fisher cast his eyes about him in search of something that would answer in imitating the flies upon which the trout were feeding. Feathers were naturally the first materials thought of and the old Red Cock's Hackle was the first of all the artificial insects. The old, old Adam of them all. The breed has been increasing for several hundred years and numbers 2,000 or more at the present day. Of salmon flies alone there are several hundred patterns. These belong to the lure order mostly, as do many of the large flies used for bass and trout. The little old Red Hackle remains a good fly to this day and is put upon bodies of many colors, peacock herl being perhaps as well liked as anything; red wool is favored by many.

The artificial insect has been the subject of many arguments, much discussion, and a great deal of thought and patient labor have been devoted to its construction. From time to time new materials have been suggested or patented, particularly for making the wings, but we are always compelled to return to feathers. One firm of tackle makers went so far as to have the wings of real insects collected and prepared by some secret process to make them tough and durable. Gauzy silk was also tried and there was one fly with patent wings that made a noise in the air like a quail rising from a briar patch. Men who are fond of fly-fishing are pretty sure to accumulate a large stock of flies; they are easily stowed away and sometimes the most unlikely looking patterns may prove to be of value. The bulk of our captures will be made with a few favorite flies in which we have confidence, but do not despise a large assortment. One advantage of the eyed hook is that the flies may be kept for years without deteriorating to any extent. There is no gut snell to rot or weaken. I use these hooks a great deal for tail flies and in dry-fly fishing, but have a sneaking fond-

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ness for the old snelled hooks—nothing can be neater and they are convenient for droppers.

The great desideratum in fly-fishing is to keep out of sight of the keen eyes of the trout. Beware also of casting the shadow of your person or of your moving rod over the water you are about to fish. Fish into the sun or even into the moon if you should chance to essay fly-fishing by moonlight. Early in the season a bright sunshiny day is favorable. Later, an overcast sky is an advantage and after a hot day the evening fishing is often good. Something can usually be done between 10 o'clock and 2:00 P. M. Very many baskets have been made between those hours. On the streams I have fished most frequently of recent years an upstream wind appears to be in one's favor, probably because it usually comes from the south, yet I have had great sport in a gusty northwest wind with cold showers of rain at intervals. A short light rain certainly helps one, but I never did anything in a regular downpour, except on one occasion. I never paid a great deal of attention to the weather in advance, being only too glad to go fishing when I had the opportunity. I remember starting by train one afternoon when the weather was doubtful and I had only the next day at my disposal. Before we had traveled fifty miles the rain descended in torrents and when I reached the stream it was almost in flood and very dirty. I went to bed in a perfectly hopeless mood, intending to take the first train home in the morning. However, at breakfast I was informed that the water was clearing. Conditions improved as the day advanced, and I enjoyed splendid sport, killing many fine trout. The very uncertainty of the business makes it more interesting, and a few fish taken under adverse conditions are highly valued. The most sporting water is well stocked with shy fish of large size, which can only be deduced by our very best efforts. Killing such trout greatly enlarges our self-esteem. Nothing is more discouraging than a bad light—I mean those atmospheric conditions that make the finest leader show up with crudity and the best artificial fly appear as just what it is, the veriest humbug. If the fly, when it is in the water, looks natural to you, it usually kills fish, so it must appear all right to them.

In dry-fly fishing I like the leader to be just under the surface—never could do much when it floated like a snake or made a straight

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line in the water. The fly cannot float too cockily. Of course, I do not pretend to be a past master of dry-fly or any other style of fishing, but we are always learning something either from personal experience or from other anglers. There are just a few men who lock up everything they learn in their own breasts and imagine that no one knows anything worth while except themselves. The great charm of fly-fishing is that we are always learning; no matter how long we have been at it, we are constantly making some fresh discovery, picking up some new wrinkle. If we become conceited through great success, some day the trout will take us down a peg. We may see them rising madly, yet no fly we can put up is of any service whatever. Again we hook an enormous trout only to lose him through stupid blundering upon our part.

In dry-fly work it is often difficult to float the fly naturally, unless the current flows evenly and we are directly below the fish. If trout are rising in almost still water or an eddy under the far bank and the current is swift between the angler and the fish, the cast is a difficult one. The stream seizes the line and drags the fly out of the eddy at once; in fact, this tendency to drag is a nuisance in many places and is sometimes impossible to overcome. Throwing a slack line will often allow the fly to float naturally long enough to raise the trout. I was taught to believe that every rising trout would be missed if the line was not straight between the rod point and the fly, but this is not the fact in this fishing. There may be a long curve in the line or quite a slack line in the water, yet the fish may be struck successfully. With large trout a slight delay is probably an advantage, as usually they take the fly more slowly than the small fish.

In wet-fly fishing a straight line is more of a necessity, yet I believe that large trout are often missed or are lightly hooked through hasty striking. The fly may even be pulled away before it is in the mouth of the trout if the fish is seen before the rise. One cannot make hard and fast rules for fly-fishing. Trout rise differently under varying conditions. They may rise boldly with a splash or just dimple the water as they suck in an insect. I have seen them leap out of the water and strike down upon the fly or miss it altogether. Again a big fish has slowly finned itself after the fly, like a cat creeping upon a mouse,

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until very close, and then pounced upon it like a tiger. There is endless variety in the sport, and if we are in good health no day is long enough for us. From the first cast in the morning to the last one at night is but a moment. We have been absorbed in our occupation and happy for many hours. When I was quite a small lad I made up my mind that one day should be long enough, anyhow. I tumbled out of bed before daylight in the longest day in the year, June 22, and tramped far up the stream. I was casting my flies as the sun rose and continued fishing until 9 o'clock at night. I killed three trout in the morning, one at noon, and three at night, seven in all, and returned home completely worn out. I was really satisfied for several days.

In lake fishing for large trout one may do best by sinking his flies and drawing them through the water with short, slow jerks. The same is true in black bass fishing, and numbers of the pike family may often be deluded in much the same way. A very large, light-colored fly is best for the latter. Skittering a fly for pickerel is not bad fun if you have nothing better in view. I have had great sport fly-fishing for the big-mouth bass and occasionally with the more gameful small-mouth.

As Dr. Henshall has succeeded in his efforts to hatch the grayling artificially and has distributed thousands of the fry in several States, I trust that in years to come this beautiful fish will become abundant in many of the waters suited to its habits. It spawns in the spring and is in fine condition when the trout are up the streams and on the spawning beds. It is a fine game fish and free riser at the fly. Unfortunately it has been almost exterminated in Michigan, where nothing was done to keep up the stock. While the streams which it inhabited were liberally supplied with trout, naturally the latter had the best of it. Many of our waters are so full of feed for the fish that they could carry comfortably large numbers of both trout and grayling, but there may be a few in which only a limited number of fish can thrive. The number of well-fed, healthy trout in streams that are very little fished and where there has been no great mortality from other causes, is sometimes extraordinary. I have heard of twenty-eight pounds of trout being taken from one stand in a long June evening.

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Fly-fishing for grayling differs little from trout fishing. They are rather finical and require considerable variety of fly. A little tinsel or a red tag sometimes adds to the attractions of the small flies most in use. The late Fred Mather was a great admirer of the grayling and this is certainly a strong argument in favor of the fish. The ordinary trout fly tackle is all that is required for them, although in England some men are fond of what is called "swimming the worm" for grayling. A rod of about twelve feet is used with a fine line, small hook, and a tiny cork float. The worms must be small, bright and well scoured. In William Henderson's "My Life as An Angler" many great takes of trout with worm are chronicled and much has been written by English writers of the "clear water worm." The majority of American anglers eschew the worm as their love of fly-fishing increases and only resort to it when trout are required for food. When we were young we carried a variety of baits in addition to flies and the unfortunate trout were tempted in several ways. We killed all we could and were quite destructive. As a man grows older he cares less for slaughter. One of the very best "clear water" worm fishers in this country, who, I am confident, could hold his own anywhere, has used the artificial fly exclusively for years and kills quite enough trout to satisfy him.

A number of fly-fishers may follow one another on a fairly large stream and each one of them enjoy fair sport, but there are certain baits and methods of using the same which make the trout shy and put them off the feed for hours. This is rather a selfish business, I fancy, and its effects are more marked and noticeable after the early part of the season when the water has become low and very clear. Bait fishing and spinning are usually prohibited in club waters, and it will be noted that this rule alone, if strictly adhered to, will lead to a considerable increase in the stock of trout. On our mountain streams we usually experience a good deal of cold, windy weather in April, and trout never rise freely until the snow water has run off. I have not seen many natural flies until May in these elevated regions, although at a lower level, and further south, many gnats, brown and dun-colored ephemera, have appeared on the water before the end of March. The trout in the early days of the season are hungry and not very shy.

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Sometimes they will rise at any of the well-known artificials. A large and bright fancy fly may do as well as anything. No. 8 hook is big enough. The Silver Dun, Blue Dun, Wickham's Fancy, March Brown, Black Gnat, Beaverkill, Cow Dung, Seth Green and Royal Coachman will probably answer every purpose. The Professor and Queen of the Water are favorite flies.

In May, when natural flies of various colors appear, I like to approximate the coloring of those which are most numerous. Duns of different shades are very useful; Brown and Golden spinners are good. These with the flies already mentioned will probably be sufficient. In Maine the Blue Jay, Montreal, Parmachene Belle and Beau, B. Pond, Scarlet Ibis, Silver Doctor, Professor, Toodlebug, Brown Hackle, Large Alder and many others. No. 6 hook seems to be a favorite size now. Not so many big flies are used as formerly and some quite small flies are used on No. 8 and 10 hooks. For the landlocked salmon it is becoming the fashion to use small salmon flies in the well-known patterns, Jock Scott, Durham Ranger, Silver Doctor, Black Dose, Childer's, etc., on No. 4 to 6 hooks.

New patterns are evolved every season, but if the combinations of color are good, it will usually be found that they resemble some old or almost forgotten fly. I have often had good success with flies dressed to color and not to a pattern, but there are several of my own invention which I have found so reliable in stream fishing that I adhere closely to the original formulas. It does not pay to change a good thing unless you are positive that you are making an improvement. I remember seeing a great take of trout in Maine, with that curious fly the Jenny Lind. I pleased my fancy at the time by imagining that the reason for this was that I had seen some small bright blue butterflies near the lake. I do not suppose that the trout ever saw one of them. On the same lake I had fine sport one evening when using small imitations of natural flies. The weather had been bright with very little wind and the large flies commonly used had failed completely.

It is still possible for the man of moderate means to enjoy the pleasures of salmon fishing, but the great majority of our fly-fishers are pretty well satisfied if they can spend a few weeks on fair trout

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waters. The rivers of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia are free (except cost of license), but the only place I know of where the Atlantic salmon can be taken in the United States is in the Bangor pool in Maine. I think that it was Francis Francis who once said that "A good trout fisherman will soon become an expert salmon angler, but if the latter descends to trout fishing he may have to go to school again." I cannot quote literally as I do not remember where I read this. If a man wishes to kill large salmon with a spoon, probably the best place to go is the Compbell River, Vancouver Island. The Tyee salmon are killed there over fifty pounds weight. Salmon flies are expensive and many patterns unnecessary. Probably those mentioned for landlocked salmon, on No. 6, 3 and 1 hooks would be enough with the Black and Brown Fairies. The Blue Doctor, Beaufort Moth, Silver Gray and Bull Dog might be added to give greater variety. The Beaufort Moth is our old friend, the White-winged Coachman with a yellow tag and golden pheasant crest tail . . .

Sometimes it is very interesting to see a good fly-fisher at work, but after a time one wishes to grasp the rod himself. It is rather annoying to have spectators overlooking our sport. We prefer to be alone with nature, with perhaps one good friend somewhere in the same stream. It is pleasant to have a chum to lunch with and to share the homeward tramp. Then perhaps we realize for the first time that we are weary and the miles are not so long if we can chat and rehearse the striking events of the day.

For stream fishing the hook most used is No. 10, but Nos. 8 and 12 are favorites with many. As the water lowers and the days become warm we often find it necessary to reduce the size of our flies and it is well to be provided with a few patterns on No. 14 and 16 hooks. There are two scales employed by manufacturers of hooks. One begins at 000, the smallest size, 00, and 0 next, then No. 1 up to about 17 or larger. The other scale begins at No. 18 smallest and runs up to No. 1. The sizes above No. are 0, 1-0, 2-0, 3-0 up to about 9-0 or 10-0. This seems rather mixed until one becomes accustomed to it, and we never feel safe unless we say No. 10 old, No. 5 new style in asking for hooks in a shop where we are unknown.



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There is a strange charm about the use of tiny flies and very fine tackle, particularly for trout of large size. The means to the end seem so frail and inadequate, yet it is astonishing how much can be done with the finest gossamer casts if they are made of fresh, sound drawn gut. The great danger is in the strike. Anything like a sharp jerk is fatal. If the strain is steady, quite a heavy pull will be safely endured in water where there are few dangerous obstructions. Some of the large brown trout are very cunning and will take advantage of any rocks, stumps or water-logged branches. The fairest, most heedless of all the trout warriors is probably the rainbow. He fights desperately, but has no tricks as far as my experience goes. We can only speak of fish as we have known them and trout are kittle cattle. I remember one pool where the trout rose well only between 2 and 3 o'clock in the afternoon. I had tried the place many times before I became aware of this. Not far below was a small deep hole from which I had never taken a trout. One day I saw a rise in it at a tiny insect, of which a good many were to be seen. Putting up a Dun on a No. 16 hook, I killed two trout, the first 12 and the second 18 inches long. Of course I fished this spot many times thereafter, but never caught another trout in it, large or small. In a low stage of water trout are very shy and secretive and are wonderfully successful in hiding themselves away. At such times one may form a very poor opinion of a stream that is really well stocked. In re-stocking a water that has been depleted, yearling trout will give much better results than fry, even if the number is very much smaller. One often hears of the good sport enjoyed in old streams that for years had been considered worthless for angling. The brown trout is a great sticker and will, I believe, do well in waters that are not cold enough for our native brook trout. They have splendid fishing in New Zealand for brown trout and our rainbows, all from the importation of eyed ova. No member of the salmon family was native to these islands, and the astonishing results attained in about twenty years show what can be done in barren waters by the exercise of patience and perseverance. Of course the first requisite is an adequate supply of natural food for the fish. The supply must be large if we expect to have big trout.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

In mid-winter, when the cold is intense and the ground is covered with snow, the anglers begin to think and talk about fishing. Let two or three be gathered together and one will hear some very interesting stories. I heard a good many such during the holidays. One fisherman of the rough and ready sort was relating a wonderful tale of how he hooked, played and lost a monster trout. All other baits failing, he had used a young white mouse, and the last words I heard were, "O! I tell you, there is nothing like mice. Have a box with cotton in it to keep them warm and comfy and just hook them through the skin on the back." Artificial mice can be bought in the shops, and I once carried one to Maine with me, intending to experiment with it, but I forgot to try it. It would not have been fly-fishing, anyway, and that is the sport which really grasps and holds us until the very last day of our lives. The subject is a very fascinating one and next to the actual fishing we love to think, talk and write about it.

### THE SENDER OF THE AMERICAN PHOTO

F. G.  
FEBRUARY 23,  
1907

I WAS MUCH pleased to find the little photograph (originally coloured) of the Mongaup in the last issue of the *Fishing Gazette*. I forgot to add the "Happy New Year" and my name. I would like you to have some notion of the trout streams in Sullivan County. They have been celebrated for more than half a century, and there is a good deal of free fishing in them still. Of course, the free portions are heavily fished, but a little restocking would make up for this. I mailed you a photograph of a waterfall and portion of a pool to-day, but this is not just what I wanted. I now enclose two photographs of a larger stream. The Neversink is called a river.

The large pool is a very fine one. A magnificent brown trout of 6½ lb. was killed in it early one morning—it had been a resident for several years. A cold spring flows into this pool, and the trout gather near it in the summer weather. As it is near the village it is heavily fished, yet I had many trout out of it last season.

I love these old streams—Neversink, Beaverkill, Willowemoc,

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

etc.—and they have given much sport and pleasure to thousands of anglers.

P.S.—It is very cold, with deep snow. We are banked in with it, and it is piled high in the streets, and still snowing.

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

## LITTLE TALKS ABOUT FLY-FISHING

F. S. IT IS WORTHWHILE to note—in regard to horse-  
MARCH 2, 1907 hair for leaders and flies—that the hair from an entire horse (stallion) is usually the strongest and best. The reason why mare's hair is apt to be weak is patent to any one who considers the matter. Sorrel hair is preferred by some people, but I have made a leader from black hair that seems quite good. It was intended for use with small-eyed flies, and has a loop at one end only. It will not do to test hair up to the breaking strain as, if stretched in that way, the strength is lost. It has been said that any good angler should be able to kill trout of one pound with a single hair, and much larger fish have been landed with it. I think that it was Francis Francis who killed a barbel of six pounds with hair, when fishing from a punt anchored in the Thames.

It is not necessary or advisable to use drawn gut early in the season when the water is high and the trout are not "educated." As the water in the streams lowers and the fish become shy, we use finer tackle and reduce the size of our flies. It is astonishing to note the size of flies used by some anglers in spring fishing. Trout will rise at almost any fly sometimes. I remember seeing a large dragonfly taken from the surface of a large still pool by a fish of not over nine inches in length. It was swallowed also, as it did not appear again.

I witnessed a pretty sight at the lower end of that same pool one day in summer. Four young cranes (great blue heron) were fishing and loafing about, and by careful stalking I was able to ensconce myself in a comfortable position within thirty yards of them. One of the cranes was actually lying on the warm sand with one of its long legs stuck out, just as we have seen chickens do. Another stood near it on

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

one leg, while a third was fishing in the clear water. At that time there was a regular nesting resort of these big birds in the forest not far from the river, and a few are still found there every year. I had not been to the roost, but have been informed that the odor of decaying fish is far from pleasant and can be smelled some distance away from the nests. There are no ponds or lakes within miles of this place, yet yellow perch, bullheads and small pickerel are among the remains. My informant stated that he saw no trout, but had no doubt that small ones were caught. The young would have no difficulty in swallowing these. There is no doubt that birds of this order travel long distances in search of food. Evening after evening we have heard the quawks (night herons) following the same route, high up in the air.

For years I have feared that small-mouth black bass would establish themselves in the large pools of the Upper Beaverkill. There are plenty of them lower down the river, and a lake some distance above Sea Beach is well stocked with bass. The outlet is only about a mile long, and small bass could easily enter the Beaverkill when the water is high. I think they have done so, as I saw four little bass in a big pool near Beaverkill post office eight years ago, and others have been observed since then. A young man played quite a decent bass almost to the net last summer, and years ago I caught a half-pound bass with a trout fly near the hatchery above Rockland.

I fancy that large bass would make things very uncomfortable for the trout. They are large fellows, and wish to be boss of any water they inhabit. Even a pretty large pool would not be big enough for a three-pound bass and trout of good size.

Do all the trout which are found in the lower portions of our large streams in the spring pass on upward as the season advances and the water becomes warmer? They are not there in summer, apparently, except a few here and there, where a cold spring enters the river. There is good fishing in the Neversink and Beaverkill in May, where no one would think of casting a fly or bait in July. I know that they do go up stream to some extent, yet there is not the great increase in the number of trout in the upper waters that one would naturally expect.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

These are alive with trout, at the beginning of the season, and if large numbers arrive later from below, might be overstocked: too many fish for the food supply, particularly in the preserves, which are not hard fished.

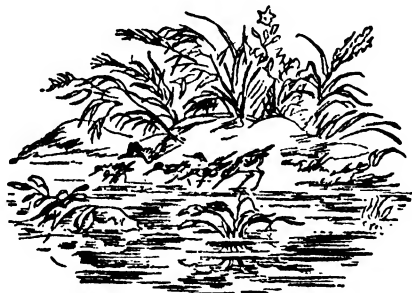
I have heard the theory advanced that many of the large trout remain in the depths of the largest pools during the hot weather. I know that they can hide themselves in a wonderful way when they wish to do so. Late in June I have seen frogs and water-snakes in the Esopus, where there had been many trout a few weeks earlier. When the rainbow trout were very numerous, there used to be a heavy run into the tributary streams in August. The Bushkill would be alive with them after a rise in the water. I remember that a tributary of the Neversink, which had been so much obstructed for two years that no fish could enter it, filled up in one night after a cloudburst, which cleared the mouth of the brook and changed the channel of the main stream. It was hard to believe that such enormous quantities of rock and stones had been brought down out of one little brook. Large numbers of trout were taken from what had been practically barren water for two years.

One summer on the Esopus we enjoyed nearly a week of unusually cool weather; the nights were positively cold. Just by way of experiment, I went down stream, where the fishing had been miserably poor since the beginning of warm weather. The result was that nine or ten fine large trout were taken in a short afternoon. One of them, quite a buster, and another as large were lost after a good fight. The air and water became warmer the next day and the fishing deteriorated again, so that it was not worth while to cover the same water. We had to go up where it was cooler. It is pleasant to wade without water-proofs in summer, and when I enter the stream I like to feel a little shock of cold. Then I can fish with some confidence in the result, but if the water is tepid, almost the same temperature as the air, I prepare myself for a day of disappointment. We are apt to feel languid in hot weather, and the trout are doubtless affected in much the same way by warm water. A trout stream should always be cold. It appears bright and sparkling as long as the temperature is fairly low; dull and uninteresting when overheated by a long journey under a blazing sun.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

How we detest a sawmill on one of our favorite streams! The sappy, heavy sawdust not only floats on the surface, but sinks to the bottom and permeates the entire river. The trout will not rise; in fact, I do not believe that natural flies would be noticed, even if they would come up through the trash, and hatch out on the surface. Those sawmills are responsible for many muttered bad words, and for several melancholy days. There have been times when one had to wait until after 6 o'clock before he could hope to basket a trout. Country sawmills usually quit at 6. I wish they would quit at 6 A. M. and never start up again. What a lot of trees would be saved to glorify the forests. Wood has advanced so much in price that every little piece of pine or hemlock in the country is hunted out and doomed to swift destruction. Why not hold these remnants for a further advance? They cannot be replaced in a hundred years. We can only hope that deciduous trees will spring up in their place.

Every day I see the head of the largest trout I ever hooked, but did not land. His big mouth, filled with teeth, gapes ferociously at me and his glassy eyes glare savagely. He seems to say, "Why didn't you land me in good sporting style, instead of leaving me to be done to death in a net? If you had not struck so hard my teeth would not have cut the gut above the fly, and we might have fought it out to a finish." I can reply, "Why did you hide under that rock and then sneak after the fly in such a poky way? You know that I had to draw the line through the rings with my left hand, and that you were barely fifteen feet away when you pounced on the fly. Of course the strike was hard. You were too heavy to give the least little bit. Why didn't you rise in a sensible way?" Six pounds eleven ounces.



# THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

## AMERICAN NOTES

F. G.  
MARCH 16,  
1907

THE PRETTIEST of white wings may be made from the snowy feathers of a tame pigeon. If the feathers of fine texture be selected, nothing works so sweetly in a double wing. The Coachman flies are much used in many parts of this country, although it is hard to imagine what the trout take them for. The common Coachman may resemble one of those beetles which have fine white under-wings beneath a hard outer set. The Royal Coachman may be accepted as a glorified ant of some kind; but both these theories are rather far fetched, and may not hold water.

I wish that all our brown trout were of the yellow variety, as in many parts of Scotland, for instance. They are lovely fish, quite as handsome as *fontinalis*, I think. The contrast between one of these beauties and a black, old brown trout is surprising, as they are the same fish precisely. Unfortunately, there are only a few streams where they are in the majority. But the puzzling thing about it is that one finds the brown and the yellow trout in the same pool. I killed a 2¼-lb. specimen last season, which was greatly admired by everyone who saw it, and I remember a 5½-lb. female trout taken some years ago which was magnificent in condition and coloration.

A past-master of the dry fly would, no doubt, be sadly disgusted at the notion of fishing dry when the trout are not rising, but sometimes we are obliged to make our means serve our ends, or have no sport at all. There are days when, under a bright sun, every trout on a shallow is lying in the shade of a rock or under some other cover, and no flies worth mentioning are hatching out. These fish are often on the look-out for any fly that may come dancing down the little glide at the side of the obstruction, and the artificial insect must be placed with great care, so that it may come floating down in exactly the same way. One sees a little dimple, within an inch of the stone, for instance, and the next instant a fine trout is rushing away up stream. Not many fish will be taken, but at the time of the year of which I am thinking it is

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

something of a triumph to kill trout at all, except possibly at night or during the short evening rise, which is so often disappointing. One of the great charms of the dry-fly method is that occasionally it enables one to take fish that have become too shy for the wet fly. You may not admire this kind of fishing, but it is interesting, and exciting as well.

Some day we will have our Switzerland in America. There is no reason why all the delightful winter sports practised in that country should not be enjoyed in the Catskills and throughout all this elevated region. At present horse racing on the ice is greatly favoured, and although the purses offered are small, the fun is great. A track is cleared on one of the numerous small lakes, and the course is always straight away—best three out of five heats usually. Coasting, at present, is given up largely to the younger generation, and the youngsters, boys and girls, have a glorious time on their long double runners. The front sled plays on a pivot, which facilitates steering as the merry party come tearing down one of the long steep hills, where the snow has been well packed down and worn smooth. A few of the older people have skis and snow-shoes, but none of them that I have seen seemed very expert. However, they have lots of fun.

While an old-fashioned Northern winter in the mountains may offer many healthy outdoor pleasures, it must be admitted that our far Southern States are very attractive to an angler at this season. The best of the tarpon fishing comes later, after the water becomes warmer, but there are many other species which afford the best of sport. Gentlemen who were spending the winter on the Homosassa River, when I was in Florida years ago, told me that they had killed thirteen varieties of fish on trout rods with large artificial flies. The Channel bass, or redfish of the Gulf of Mexico, is very game, and has been taken on fly over 30-lb. weight. The so-called sea trout, a species of weak fish, is a fine riser at almost any gaudy fly. All the shoal-water fish enter the estuaries of the small spring-water rivers of the west coast of Florida, and an angler could have a delightful time on any of these clear waters, unless they have greatly changed. One of my favourite amusements used to be to float over the large pools in a



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

small boat, on a bright, still day. The "Alligator Hole" on the Wickawatcher was like a great aquarium. On one occasion, I remember, a large alligator lay upon a bed of yellow sand at the bottom of the pool, and six giant sawfish had come in with the tide. Hundreds of fish of many kinds were swimming about, and, in rowing up stream, a continuous procession of mullet could be seen striving to get away from the boat. The fishing may have deteriorated in a few places, but I hear that it is as good as it ever was at many points along the West Coast. Everyone talks about tarpon, jewfish, and other giants, but a great deal of sport is to be had with light tackle among fish of moderate proportions.

There are many tempting, charming things that one might do, but how can we enjoy the spring when it comes, and the early trout fishing, unless we have pulled through a long, cold winter, surrounded by snow and ice? Our season opens on April 16 for trout, and the time between then and now is not too long to enjoy the pleasures of anticipation. Thinking about fly-fishing and getting ready for it are almost as good as the real thing. Even now we are tying flies and fussing over hooks, gut, and feathers of many kinds. We never have enough materials for making more flies, although probably we would be the gainer if one-half the trash we have accumulated was thrown into the fire. Yet what interest there is in seeking for materials that are hard to find. My tribulations in regard to the single item of gold wire would fill a book.

The streams are all right at present, but the danger will come when the ice breaks up. It seems to be the general impression among men of experience that the trout suffer severely when ice jams are formed and then go out on a freshet. A jam of heavy ice acts as a dam, backing up the water behind it, and when the whole outfit goes out suddenly, what becomes of the fish? They may be killed, carried away, or left high and dry on the fields. Last winter and spring there was scarcely anything of this kind to complain of, and we enjoyed one of the best angling seasons on record.

I hope that none of the birds we love will be deceived this year by treacherous weather. Two or three mild days at the end of February,

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

1906, brought many of the spring migrants—such as robins and blue-birds—from their winter homes in the South. They had only just arrived, when heavy snow fell, and the thermometer dropped to 10 deg. below zero. All must have perished, as the cold weather continued through the month of March. They found no food on their arrival, and could not have had strength enough, chilled as they were, for a return flight to the warm southland from which they came.

The Gold-ribbed Hare's Ear seems to be one of those flies which, like the Jock Scott salmon fly, is useful everywhere, yet I do not fancy that it is much of a favourite with American anglers. None of these flies that I have tied have satisfied me entirely, yet they have killed well. Only a few days since a local angler of much experience was telling me of the sport he had had with three Gold-ribbed Hare's Ears which I had given him. I find it difficult to tie in the legs of this fly in such a way that they support it on the water. I have a few English flies which are perfectly dressed in this respect. The hare's face legs stand out all around the head of the fly exactly like a good hackle, but these flies were tied by a man who is acknowledged to be one of your greatest experts.

I really believe that I am on the trail of a strain of blue gamecocks, at last. They are of fighting stock, and both cocks and hens are described as blue.



## LITTLE TALKS ABOUT FLY-FISHING

F. S.

APRIL 6, 1907

THE LONG WINTER is over and spring is here. The "break up" began on March 15, and wild geese passed northward on the 16th. These were followed by great companies of crows, and robins and bluebirds were not far behind. The song sparrow was singing while all the land was still under a heavy mantle of snow. Anglers are happy, as the outlook is very encouraging. We should have good fly-fishing earlier than usual

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

this year. The ice went out quietly from the large streams; no jams formed and it does not seem possible that any damage was done to the trout. The snow has disappeared in much the same way. It melted quite rapidly, but there were no heavy rains and no floods or freshets of the harmful kind. We may have too much water this month of April, but upon the whole developments have been in our favor, and we may look forward confidently to good sport during the first weeks of the open season. We know that the streams were fairly well stocked after the season ended in 1906, and many trout were seen on the spawning beds. In this part of the State November seems to be the month when most of the ova are deposited, but a few trout were seen on the redds in December. In 1905 I saw fish at work before the end of October.

We sympathize with the anglers who burn to wet their lines on the very first day of the trout season, although we know very well that the early fishing is often disappointing on these mountain streams. In mid-April the weather is apt to be cold and windy, the water is high and often tinged with snow brew. But never mind, it is blessed to go, even if we do not kill a fish. The air may be raw, but there is a breath of spring in it and many of the birds have arrived. The peeps and frogs have come up from their winter quarters down in the mud and are doing their best to assist the feathered singers in celebrating the advent of spring.

If the big streams are absolutely unfishable, something can usually be done in the small brooks and bennic kills. There is much water everywhere, and trout may be found in places that would be hopeless, from our point of view, a few weeks later. It is surprising what good fish one may take in little pools near the main river. I remember wading up a shallow streamlet for some distance, looking for a likely place, and presently coming to a little pool which washed the base of a flat rock. Upon that rock stood a little Negro girl, who had been trying to open the trout season with a stick and a string. I did not wish to poach upon her pool, but as a matter of form, dropped my fly at the edge of the stone and not three feet from the small maiden's toes. It was seized at once by a half-pound native trout, which had been lurking under her pedestal, and I am not sure who was more surprised, the

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

child or myself. Trout are not very shy in these first days of the season. If the water is discolored and some members of your party are trout hungry, the humble angleworm may be used to grub out a few for the table. This will not satisfy the sentiment very well, as most of us have been looking forward to fly-fishing, pure and simple, and frequently the patient and persevering disciple will accomplish something, even when the prevailing conditions are not favorable.

An unusually large fly or a bright, fancy pattern may kill a few fish. If no rises are seen, the fly may be well sunk, allowed to drift a little and then brought up with slight twitches of the rod top. Silver and gold bodies are attractive, and that gay fellow, the Royal Coachman, must not be forgotten. I am thinking now of mountain rivers which flow at high altitudes, and where, thus early in the spring, but few natural flies have appeared upon the surface. The trout are hungry, but are not very active and are on the lookout for food in the middle depths of the stream. Often they may be found in water of no great depth, and if you strike one, it usually has company; in fact, large schools often gather in a favored spot, out of the current in a quiet eddy, particularly if a little snow water is still running. The trout have wintered in the deep pools and if the season is backward may not have fully distributed themselves throughout the stream. Snow water has a greenish cast if not otherwise discolored, and little can be done when it is present.

At lower levels than this and further south conditions are different. I have seen large batches of duns and gnats during the latter part of March and early in April. Hereabouts the natural flies are not often numerous until May. I have been successful with a large gold-ribbed palmer-hackle with red tag when other flies failed. The red tag was added to attract attention and give it a warm look; otherwise it might pass for a larva of some sort. A large March Brown may be tied, and some anglers favor the Seth Green. The Wickham is always worthy of a trial, and in some waters I have found the Silver Dun very killing. We have nothing to guide our selection, and one would imagine that one fly would answer as well as another, but this is not the fact, although the fish are not as discriminating as they become later in the season.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

The water is intensely cold and no one should be careless in regard to his wading gear. Old stockings or waist waders should be tested and repaired, or replaced by a new outfit. It is not wise to neglect these things until just before you leave home.

I wish that it was possible to revisit all our old haunts during the best portion of the season. There are many fine streams in Pennsylvania which I have not fished for many years. Some of these are ideal from the dry-fly fisher's point of view, particularly the limestone streams which are formed by great springs which gush from the rocks in large volume. These streams flow slowly, for the most part, the rifts are shoal and there are many dams upon them. There is a great deal of moss in these dams and this is good cover for the larvac of insects—snails, shrimps, etc. Such waters carry a large stock of trout and afford very interesting sport. When I knew them, they were hard fished during the first days of the season and the trout soon acquired an education; but what numbers there were! In June I have seen the water covered with the dimples made by rising trout as far as my view extended. This was in the evening after the sun was off the water, in the Big Spring, a large stream which flows through Newville, Pa. . . . Not so many years ago 3,800 were reported in a newspaper, as being taken on the opening day. In any stream that has been stocked with the brown or yellow trout for five or six years, it is always possible that we may strike a fish of extraordinary size, one that will give us a shaking up that we are slow to forget. From 1894 to about 1900 there were a good many of these big trout, but they are now very scarce. During the long-continued droughts in summer they are located, and some men will do anything almost to gain possession of them. It may be that they grew more rapidly when there were not so many brown trout in the streams. It seems to me that there were more large minnows at that time, and I think the big caddis has decreased in number. Any decrease in the food supply would, of course, affect the growth of the fish, but we know that the average size of the trout taken is just about as good as it ever was.

It was reported that a trout of eight pounds was killed in the Esopus near Phœnicia last summer, but I do not know whether this is correct or not. Formerly there was a grand stock of the rainbow

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

trout in this stream, the Esopus, but since the advent of the brown trout they have decreased greatly in size, and in numbers also, I believe. This is unfortunate, as this is one of the very few streams in the east where this species really was established, and a pronounced success for years.

Rainbows have often done well for two years and then disappeared. They try to go to sea, probably. In many of the rivers of the Cascade range of mountains the larger rainbow trout are said to visit the ocean regularly, running up again early in July or late in June. The rainbow is certainly one of the most sporting fish of its inches that swims, and I wish that they were more abundant in the east. I have taken a few in Sullivan County waters, but only a few. The native trout are still to be found in large numbers in the headwaters of the streams, and fish of fair size are taken lower down. But the brown trout is our main dependence in a day's fly-fishing. It is a grand game fish also.

If we wish to have native trout (*fontinalis*), we must restock with yearlings. The *fario* is the hardier fish and it grows rapidly. It is natural, in restocking, to select the species which gives the largest increase and the quickest returns in the way of sport. We wish to kill fish which are large enough to make their capture exciting. The first rush of a big trout is something worth living for, and we are never sure of him until he is in the basket. I have seen a two-pound fish landed and then lost down a muskrat hole. If the trout leaps at end of his first run, how enormous he appears! I have been quite sure that a three-pounder weighed at least five pounds. This is the right kind of excitement. It rejuvenates an elderly man and takes him back to the days of his boyhood; in fact a good angler never feels old as long as he can cast his fly to a rising trout.

The days are all too short when one goes fishing. This is true even when the fates are unkind and luck against us. With a few good trout in the creel our ardor is satisfied. We stroll along and take things easily. We enjoy our surroundings and are interested in the bird and insect life about us. But should it be an off day, when the fish are glued to the bottom of the stream, how hard we work to tempt them! We feel a certain animosity against the trout. "Confound them! They must rise at something." Fortunately our mood is easily sweetened

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

and a little success goes a long way. If it was always easy to take trout, surely we would not be so fond of fly-fishing.

### LITTLE TALKS ABOUT FLY-FISHING

F. S.        THE MERRY MONTH of May has blown itself out  
JUNE 15, 1907 and summer begins with a cold storm from the east. Spring was very late this year. Snow fell and ice formed at night after the middle of May. The seed corn that was planted at the usual time failed to germinate and rotted in the ground. In spite of the uncomfortable weather conditions trout fishing has been quite good. There was much less rain than usual in April and the streams were low and clear. The streams have risen occasionally during the past month, but have rarely been too much discolored for fly-fishing. High winds have interfered considerably with the angler's pleasure, but we have had a few days when water, wind and weather were favorable, and the trout rose well. Unless the day was very cold there was usually a hatch of flies some time between 11 A.M. and 4 P.M. and sport was good for one or two hours. Of course the energetic fisherman who toiled all the day would have the best basket at night, but his captures were rather infrequent, except during the short period of the rise.

For a time the natural flies were mostly duns of various descriptions, but latterly there have been a good many small caddis flies on the water. These do not sail down gracefully after the manner of the ephemera, but struggle and buzz upon the water. It is extremely difficult to imitate their movements, although a man who is an expert in manipulating his drop fly may be successful. By moving this drop fly four or five feet up the casting line one can command the water at fair range. If the flies are close together one can only dap the dropper with a short line. In imitating these small flies the buzz form, without wings, seems best, but it is often difficult to find hackles of the proper colors. You will note that these hackle flies have some resemblance to the buzzing fly on the water. However, it may pay best to fish a single winged fly on the surface. One can only discover which is best by experimenting.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

Last week there was a good rise of what I call the small spring brown. Very late in the season, I think, for this fly, and the body is quite light colored. It will become still paler as the weather grows warmer. This is one of the ephemera and a very pretty fly. There is another brown dun which is nearly twice the size of this one, and changes into a very handsome spinner. In the angler's life there is much discomfort and many disappointments, but fortunately he remembers only his good days, or, if he remembers the times of misfortune, it is in a humorous way. He laughs at the miseries he has experienced in the past. One afternoon will stand out in my recollections of the past spring as blessed for all time to come. The day was bright with a strong wind blowing and I happened to be well placed when the hatch of natural flies began about half past one. Trout of fair size began rising and by the time the flies disappeared I had basketed sixteen which made a brave show, filling a large tray.

Contrast this experience with another afternoon when the stream was filled with sawdust and bits of floating wood. Not a fly on the water and not a trout to be seen anywhere. A stranger might have imagined that the river was barren of game fish. The water soaked through my wading stockings and my legs and feet felt as if I was weighted down for deep-sea diving. My old rod gave out in driving the line against the wind and I felt as disconsolate as if the sorrows of the nations had been placed upon my shoulders. It is all right; we must take the rough with the smooth, but I wish some genius would invent really comfortable wading gear. My outfit, when wet, must weigh in the neighborhood of ten pounds.

If a few pounds will handicap a horse, how much more must a mere man feel the ill effects of such weights as we have to carry. A great many fishermen now wear long rubber boots, but they are slippery and dangerous in a large, rough stream. I believe that some of these are made with leather soles and hobnails, but fear that these would be very heavy and unwieldy.

If we could increase the stock of natural flies, fishing would probably improve. All the best sport this spring has been had during "the time of the take" or hatch of natural flies. There would be less temptation to use minnows and worms as bait if the trout were seen rising



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freely at flies. When there is a rise of flies and of trout we can usually find water suitable for dry-fly fishing, and that method certainly has its fascinations. I sometimes fancy that in these mountain rivers, the angler who sticks to the wet fly will in the long run kill more fish, but when one has been touched with the dry-fly mania he often wishes to fish that way when conditions are not favorable.

It has been pointed out to me that wet-fly fishing, as practiced by the best American anglers, does not at all resemble "sunk fly" or "chuck and chance it" as described by many Englishmen and the school of the dry-fly generally. We fish up stream, often to rising trout, and one or more false casts are made in the air to free the fly and tackle from moisture and spread the hackle. The fly may not be dry, but it is on or very close to the surface. Rises are as distinctly seen as in dry-fly fishing and the strike follows in the instant or the trout is missed. Englishmen usually by "wet-fly" refer to down-stream fishing, with two or more flies well sunk, and it would appear from some of the quotations made by my correspondents that the trout are expected to hook themselves or to be struck when the rise (or bite) is felt, but not seen. I know a number of Americans who fish the dry-fly with perfect grace and precision, but they do not practice it exclusively or make a fetish of it. Francis Francis, one of the greatest of British anglers, practiced all three methods of fly-fishing, dry, wet and sunk, also up and down streams, as the occasion necessitated, but he belonged to no particular school, and he seems to have fished in all parts of the United Kingdom.

In spite of the cold and backward spring it is blessed to be in the trout country again. Scarcely a leaf was to be seen on the trees until the middle of May or even a little later, but all the fruit trees are now in bloom, lovely and fragrant to the beholder. The birds arrived earlier than last year, but the cold weather seems to have made them less tuneful than usual. There have been a few warm bright days when they seemed to be united in a full chorus of song and thanksgiving for the good gifts of spring weather and a happy summer to come, but at times it has struck me that they were remarkably silent. They cannot enjoy cold, windy weather much more than we do.

What becomes of the big trout that are not killed by the angler?

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These fish are often well known, and when taken are sure to be recorded, yet after dwelling in the same pool for a number of years they vanish. Probably they go out of condition after a time, become old and weak, and are swept away by the next spring flood to form food for the eels. All big trout should be warned in time and get themselves caught before they become too old and seedy to do anybody good. I know a big chap that has considered the matter several times this spring. He comes at the fly or bait and then turns away. The trouble is that he is overwise and may go to the eels if he is not careful. However, I have hopes of him in spite of the contempt with which he has treated the most refined and courteous invitations.

### AMERICAN NOTES

F. G. I WONDER WHETHER you are having better  
JULY 6, 1907 weather than we are? Over here the spring has been very late, and now in the early days of June it is still too cold and windy for comfort. As regards the trout fishing in the middle Eastern States, reports vary a good deal. All are agreed that the fish are numerous, but there are many complaints of the weather. Friends write me of occasional days of great success, but also of many disappointments.

On the streams in this part of America there has been a rise of fly nearly every day when it was not too cold and stormy; but this rise has not begun until noon or later, and has not continued more than an hour or two. I have had some fair sport, but only two afternoons will be remembered with gratitude and furnish material for pleasant thoughts in the time to come. (Since this was written have had better sport.) One of these fortuitous occasions was recorded yesterday, and I may say that for about two hours I was in a very cheerful frame of mind. There was a good hatch of fly, and I happened to be in the right place when it began. Probably there would have been half an hour more of it, but four men came down stream casting flies, worms, and minnows, and the fish stopped rising, as a matter of course. I had nine pounds, including one two-pounder.

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It was pleasant to see "Val Conson's" name at the end of an article in the *Fishing Gazette*. Surely the subject of fly-making can never be exhausted. One is always learning something new, or that one thinks is new until he finds it all written out in some old book. Then we have so many fancies in regard to flies and the materials which are best for them. "V. C." has returned to dubbing, while some other people are still wedded to quills. I have as many as the "fretful porcupine" (why fretful?—I do not know of a more stupid, quiet beast, except that he keeps one awake at night in camp, gnawing everything in the neighbourhood), and wish for more. I presume that the porcupine's habit of erecting its quills as a means of defence led to its being described as fretful.

The peacock quill certainly makes a very natural-looking ribbed body for many flies, and I should be glad to have it in all colours. It is weak, but by brushing a little varnish or glue in the foundation the body of the fly will endure more hard service. Not long ago I noted that I had killed sixteen good trout with one fly, and doubtless have had more durable specimens than this one. A dun on the water last week had wings well speckled with black markings. When this fly first appears the body is brown with golden rings, but later hatches become yellow underneath, with the brown much lighter and showing only in the back. The feathers under the wings of the drake spoonbill widgeon are the best that I know of for imitating the wings of this fly, but not many of them are well marked as required for the fly. There are two stylets in the tail, which is minutely ringed, and the legs have a few dark specks on them. The hatch of flies on certain days has consisted almost exclusively of the small things (caddis) which buzz and flutter on the water; I do not attempt to imitate these actions, but steadily fish dry over the rising trout.

Upon the whole, there has been a better show of natural flies than there was last season, although several flies that were on the water last May did not appear this year at all—at least, I did not see any of them. Your British insects all seem to rise pretty regularly, their appearance being governed to a limited extent only by the weather, but on these mountain streams certain species may be quite abundant

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one season and appear in very small numbers, or not at all, the next year. I can recall one instance when a small four-winged fly was on every day for nearly three weeks, yet I have only seen an occasional specimen since 1890.



For many years the dry fly seemed to gain adherents very slowly, but of late it has been enjoying something of a "boom." There was a class for dry-fly fishers at the tournament of the Anglers' Club at Harlem Mere, New York, and much more interest than formerly is taken in the art.

I have had more correspondence this year in regard to dry-fly fishing than ever before, and there is no doubt that we have a great deal of water that is well suited to it. The wet fly will always remain a favourite method on many of the rapid streams. There are days when it is more profitable, when an expert will kill many more trout than he would with dry fly, if equally proficient in that style of fishing.

The difficulty is that the dry-fly is infected with a microbe or bacillus, which is taken into the system of the man who uses it. He kills a few fine large trout in a day when the well-beloved wet fly has proved useless, and from that time forth he is not quite the same. He wants to fish dry, and is disappointed if the conditions are against it. At times he will be seen floating his fly when the water is high and not a rise is to be seen anywhere. Yet upstream fishing with wet fly in low, clear water, as practised by many of our best anglers, is not far removed from dry-fly fishing as some may imagine. But one fly is often used and cast to a particular spot with the greatest care and nicety. If the trout are rising at naturals, they are cast to with great precision, and hooked also, for the matter of that, in many instances.

I presume that there are reaches on all chalk streams where the

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water flows very slowly or is almost dead. Now we will suppose that the day is perfectly calm, and that you have spotted the rise of a good trout in position where the current is just perceptible, nothing more. We will suppose, also, that the first cast is a good one, and the fly falls upon the water like so much thistledown, but the gut casting line floats upon the water its entire length, from reel-line to fly. Do you often succeed in getting a rise out of your trout? \*

On the waters I am in the habit of fishing, even if the fish are not scared, and go on rising at naturals, they rarely accept a dry fly attached to a floating gut-line. I do not think that this is surprising, as the finest cast in certain lights shows up dreadfully; but if it is just under the surface how much more natural the fly appears. Of course, the trout are frequently put down and no more rises are seen. What a difference a nice ripple on the water makes!

Let us pray to be delivered from a rod that is sloppy in the middle joint. Can you imagine anything more exasperating on a windy day? I had a little experience with a weapon of that description one day in May. The scene of operations was a big wide pool, and the wind was blowing half a gale up stream. A few fine trout were rising occasionally under the opposite bank, as the water there was protected by rocks jutting out. It was the chance of the day, or, rather, afternoon. Everyone knows how such a rod behaves under the above conditions. The greater the muscular effort, the poorer the result. The wretched caterpillar wags its tail and the fly soars wildly in the air. At last, by a fluke, the fly "gets there," and floats over the trout's nose. It is taken in the best of good faith, but can you hook the fish? You try to do so, but the rod feels as if it was made of rubber and tallow, and the line

\* [I was fishing recently in the crystal-clear water of the mill-dam below the famous Longparish Common water on the Test, where Colonel Hawker used to do such execution with the wet fly in the first half of last century. At the time (11 a.m.) the water was gently creeping down to the mill like molten glass in bright sunshine. Casting a dry fly a foot or two above a trout, it seemed an age until the slow movement of the stream carried a foot or so of gut and then the fly over him. But if he had not been scared by the fall of the gut and fly, he was nearly certain to give you one chance, at any rate. I got one or two by casting down to the fish, checking the line before it was fully extended, and then dropping the rod-point towards the fish to avoid dragging the fly—but I should have cast up to the fish if I had not been prevented by bushes. Our trout do not get gut-shy unless very much fished over.—R. B. M.]

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is bagged by the wind. One goes on trying, of course, and makes frantic efforts to hit his trout. At last he does hit one, and the fly is gone, left in the mouth of the fish. I give you my word, I basketed one trout after rising six or seven. Tired!—I was more fatigued than if I had been casting with a rod that weighed two ounces to the foot.

There is great difference in the quality of cane or bamboo, just as in other materials. The same specifications will not always produce the same result. One rod will be stiffer than another having the same diameters, length and weight. By using machinery for cutting the strips of cane, many rods can be turned out precisely the same, and there are men, I believe, who can do this by hand. This is the top notch of the art, but if the cane is not all that it should be, you may be disappointed when you have an old favourite copied. One cane may be lighter in weight or stiffer than another. I had a new top made for an old rod which was exactly the same in length and every other respect, but it was so much heavier that it spoiled the action of the old butt and middle joint.

Some time ago a correspondent sent me a strand of silkworm gut that was 72 in. long. He had obtained a parcel of this long gut from Japan; it was tapered from stout to fine, but I was not satisfied with its quality. The Japanese have so much patience and ingenuity that if acquainted with our wants they may be able to supply them, that is if their silkworms are capable of producing gut of best quality, and if the climate of Japan is not too cold or damp.

Why is it that so much of the gut we buy is stouter at one end than the other? Several years ago I imported one thousand pretty-looking Refina that was absolutely worthless, and has never been used. Formerly we thought that drawn gut was always fine, but of recent years I have had drawn gut that was very stout. What one requires hereabouts is first-rate natural Refina in fairly long strands, using three or four strands of this for the fine end of the casting-line. The trout in these big mountain streams are very strong, and often have the assistance of a powerful current; they are well-built fish, but not as heavy for their inches as trout from a limestone or chalk stream.

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I tried a few flies on *Modèle Parfait* hooks the other day, and killed my largest trout on one of them. I saw a rise on the opposite side of a big pool, and, in spite of the wind, succeeded in placing the fly just right. The first rush of the fish surprised me, as I had not expected anything unusual, and some minutes passed before it was landed. I found the hook upside down in the upper jaw, right under the nose of the trout. Now how did it get there? The gape of these hooks is very wide and the shank short; they are not at all pretty to look at, but bear a good reputation. However, I never had fewer losses than since I have been fishing with really first-rate Hall's eyed hooks, made with rather stout wires—they never break, and hook and hold well. Flies tied on them float well enough, but not as well as those having less metal in them—fine wired Sproats, for instance. The difference is not material, I believe.

Referring to recent comment on Redditch flies in the *Fishing Gazette*, I saw several dozen made by an English wholesale house that were very nice indeed; where dye had been used the colours were excellent; the materials throughout seemed good, and they were well made. These flies were sold at a moderate price, yet three profits and probably a duty had to be considered. I am afraid that the fly-tier was far from well paid, although I understand that many professionals are wonderfully rapid. It would be interesting to know how many double-winged floaters the best of them can turn out in a day.

I know that I cobble and mend my worn flies rather than tie new ones, particularly if the hackle is a good one of the colours hard to find; it is a difficult matter to procure hackles that are really fit for floating flies.

I must confess that using hens' hackles in front of cocks' hackles for floating flies does not satisfy me. I much prefer the latter by itself, when it is to be had of good quality. I fancy that Duns with just enough hackle to float well kill better than those dressed with two or more, and having a bushy appearance. A few stiffish hairs support the fly as well as many soft ones, and the fly cocks much better.

How very pretty many of the ephemera are. The small yellow

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duns that were on the water yesterday were exquisite in coloration. The bodies were of a delicate shade of yellow, and the wings a fine blue. The day was more genial than usual of late, and I heard that the best of the rise came on in the morning before I went to the stream. In the afternoon several different insects were sparsely in evidence, and one found only a few rising trout. Fortunately, some of the larger fish were still feeding, and we felt repaid for our hard work by a basket of five brace (as you would say). Wading these mountain rivers, and tramping over the masses of rocks and stones on their margins, is very fatiguing—a different affair entirely from strolling along the banks of a meadow stream. The heavy freshets of recent years are largely responsible for making the going so bad. Many of the small tributaries which formerly had well-defined banks, and were alive with small trout, now flow in the middle of a barren waste. They are torrents at one time and dry, or nearly dry, at another.

I do not believe that *fario* is more cannibalistic than any other trout after it reaches a large size. I have seen our own *fontinalis* take a little trout of the same species. Men are apt to look back upon the sport they enjoyed in youth with great pleasure, and I would be the last to decry the merits of our own native fish. In the north-east, where *fontinalis* thrive and are numerous and of good size, it would be wise to leave them in possession. Restocking where advisable is necessary with the same species. I am well satisfied that for many of our old streams the brown trout is most emphatically *the fish*. They increase rapidly, grow fast, rise well, and fight like demons as long as the water remains cold. All of the *Salmonidæ* becomes languid, I believe, in water which has reached a high temperature.

Recently I saw a very pretty light rod of good action which had been made from the so-called grape vine cane. First I was told that this material was of African origin, again that it came from South America, that it grew to be of large size, and for fifty or sixty feet of nearly the same diameter. The grain is perfectly straight, and the sections for a hexagonal rod are easily split out or cut with a machine. In the finished rod the wood strongly resembles cane of light colour, or



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from which the markings and cuticle have been planed away. The rod was beautifully finished in the best style, and the price was but twelve dollars at a small retail shop where fishing tackle was only an adjunct, not a specialty. There may be possibilities in this wood, but I confess that this is the only rod composed of it that I thought well of or liked at all. In buying a new rod we should always be able to test it over water. One can cast, in a way, with almost any action, but his pleasure in fishing is dependent on the rod really suiting his hand and method. You may handle many rods in a shop, and yet make a mistake in the selection of your weapon.

Last week I killed three species of trout in one stream, *fontinalis*, *fario*, and *irideus* (rainbow); this was a pleasant surprise, particularly the taking of the rainbow trout. What gay fellows they are! They leap and fight until completely exhausted. I was informed that the brown trout appeared in this stream about three years ago, but that no decrease in the number of native fish had been noticed; in fact, there were only too many small *fontinalis*. They were a perfect nuisance at times, mussing and soaking a fly that had been prepared for their older relations (grandparents, if possible.)

The weather was too cold for the evening rise until Thursday last, when, just before dusk, every fish on the river seemed to be moving. The natural flies on the water were very minute, but the larger trout were willing to accept something larger. It is only on such occasions that one forms a good idea of the immense numbers of small trout there are in a well-stocked stream. The shallow runs were simply alive with them. I trust that you are having a good time during the rise of the mayfly. It must be delightful to fish a stream, such as the Kennet is described to be, where nearly all the trout taken, at this season, run from 2 lb. to 3½ lb. I fancy that wings made from strips of summer duck, say two or three ply in each wing, and split, might answer well on your artificial mayflies. They may not be so pretty, but they do not spin, wear well, and if nicely made have a natural appearance on the water. At times this season we have had a great variety of natural flies on the water at the same time, large and small,

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dark and light coloured. It is not always an easy matter to select the best pattern of artificial at such times, and changing flies after the light begins to fail is a nuisance. By the way, the mechanical method of making the figure-of-eight knot, as illustrated in the *Fishing Gazette* some time ago, must have proved to be of much service to all who use eyed-hooks. I have used it almost exclusively since the article appeared, and if carefully made it is entirely satisfactory. A great improvement on the Turle knot.

[My experience of the evening rise on Itchen and Test so far has been like Mr. Gordon's in America—I have not found any to experience. Mayflies are often made for sunk and spent patterns with just a bunch of feather sticking out on each side, like a sea-lion's moustache. It is the oldest of the patterns, probably. I do not remember seeing a Mayfly dressed with mixed strips of feathers to imitate the set-up wing. I have never found any feather to beat that of the Rouen drake for Mayflies. One great advantage is its great delicacy and strength; it stands a lot of casting, and does not spin in the air like flies made from stiffer feathers. I prefer it undyed, but not too dark. I cannot imagine anyone preferring any knot to Major Turle's for eyed hooks for trout fishing. I fancy many think they are making Major Turle's when they are not.—R. B. M.]

## LITTLE TALKS ABOUT FLY-FISHING

F. S.      THE PRESENCE OF big fish in these waters [Wil-  
JULY 27, 1907      lowemoc, Neversink and Beaverkill] adds greatly to  
the interest and excitement of the fishing, although  
they are not numerous. They are apt to be located when the water is  
low in summer and are often taken by unfair means. For two years  
we have had very favorable conditions for the trout. No great floods  
or ice jams and good spawning seasons. Fair fishing with the fly seems  
to have little injurious effect and the streams are well stocked. In  
large, clear waters the trout soon acquire a little education which  
stands them in good stead. They become shy of gut or of anything  
unnatural in the presentation of the fly. One bungling cast and the

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large trout stop rising at once, and if really alarmed retire to the haunt or shelter which they are pretty sure to have close at hand.

I fancy that just a slight shower of rain starts the fish feeding, but only on one occasion do I remember having much sport during a heavy downpour. I had fished a pretty pool several times without success, but last Saturday as I approached it, a little patter of falling drops began. As soon as the fly touched the water it was seized by a 14½ inch trout, yet the pool had been fished by several anglers within the hour. I remember trying a big pool for the large trout known to inhabit it, some years ago, with a companion. We fished with all our skill for a long time without any success whatever, until a little shower passed over us. Then my friend cast again in water which he had fished over a few minutes before and instantly hooked a trout 21½ inches long. He held the fish very hard, but by rushing into the water with the landing net I was able to sweep that useful implement around behind the fish just as the hook broke at the bend, allowing it to drop back tail first into the net. I felt that I had had a fair share in the capture of that big trout.

The spring was so late this year that on the first of July the woods were still clothed in the tender greens of the month of June, but now everything is in the full flush of glorious summer. The nights are delightfully cool and only last week we were glad to have a wood fire in the evening.

The bulk of the good timber has been taken out of this section and what remains is being hunted out and used up as fast as possible. I wish that we could preserve what remains for the good of the streams and for the benefit of the coming generation. Unfortunately nearly everyone is after that other dollar. All the poplars, which are so beautiful in spring, will soon be cleared out of most sections to feed the pulp mills. However, we are very fortunate in having so much comparatively wild and well-wooded country near New York where the fishing is remarkably good, when one considers the large number of fishermen who whip the streams from the opening to the closing of the trout season.

A trout was killed last week by Dr. Halsey, of Brooklyn, with small fly, which weighed about 3½ pounds. Such a fish is a prize in-

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deed, and no angler needs to be informed in regard to the sport and excitement which it afforded before being safely deposited in the creel.

At times, in July, a smaller fly seems to be required than at any other time during the season. Yet again a larger mouthful may tempt the big fish. We can only try and try again. If we could reduce fly-fishing to an exact science, always follow one method and use the same flies, much of its charm would be lost. If there was no uncertainty, no disappointment, there would be no real success. These rivers are all very clear, but the Neversink is a "white" water stream. No lakes drain into it until it has danced for many miles down the valley and there is not a tinge of vegetable matter in its pellucid rifts or pools. Where in its rapid course it flows over golden sands between woods and meadows the effect is very beautiful. Unfortunately in many places great damage has been done by the floods of recent years and there seems to be no effectual way to checking these ravages.

You notice that the angler of great possessions who owns a small forest of rods, by every well-known manufacturer, is apt to use one of them nearly always and everywhere. If he carries a battery of heavy and light fly-rods to Maine or Canada he is apt to use the old weapon with which he has been whipping the bright waters of New York or Pennsylvania. The endurance of some of the modern light rods is really remarkable. Heavy salmon have been killed on small split bamboos that appeared to be merely playthings. Of course much of the reduction in weight is in the fittings and not all light rods are easy or comfortable to fish with.

The water is now quite warm, as the sun has great power and but few natural flies appear during the day. Many caddis flies hatch out at night and just at dusk yesterday evening insects of several species appeared on the water. One large flat-winged fly seemed to be at work depositing its eggs, hovering over, and frequently touching the running water. I tried to secure a specimen, but was unsuccessful, as I was without a net. A small but powerful electric light would reveal many interesting things along the streams. On one occasion I carried an oil lamp which had a good reflector and the hour was long past

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

midnight before I realized that time was flying. Several of the flies found were entirely new to me and one, at least, I have not seen since then in any water. When there is a good hatch of the ephemeridæ the trout usually rise steadily and take nearly every fly that floats over them, yet they will often allow small caddis flies to pass by untouched, taking only a few of the many that pass within their ken. For one thing the dun of the ephemera floats steadily for the most part, and is easily secured, while the caddis flies straggle and flutter about. Possibly the former have a better flavor. They are certainly among the aristocrats of the insect world and are delicately shaped and colored.

### LITTLE TALKS ABOUT FLY-FISHING

F. S.        SOME OF THE white moths found at this season  
AUGUST 3, 1907    have flesh-colored or light-buff legs, not white. These  
                      moths formerly enjoyed a great reputation for late  
evening fishing, but one does not hear so much of them nowadays.  
Very large trout have been taken with them and a good many are  
about on summer evenings. Fishing after dark is not the best of sport,  
as one cannot see the fly or the place where it falls upon the water.  
Yet it is very exciting to hook a big fish at dusk or later. Something  
tells you to strike and the next instant there is a grand rush upon  
the surface. Your quarry rushes here and there and you stumble  
blindly along with only a hazy idea as to the position of the trout.  
Success in such a fight is due quite as much to luck as to good manage-  
ment. In summer the larger fish lie close during the hours of daylight  
and they will rarely move any distance for the fly. They have an ex-  
asperating way of getting into positions where it is difficult to put a  
fly to them in a natural manner.

The other day I was about to leave a pool which I imagined I had  
fished thoroughly when a fine trout leaped from the water well under  
the branches that hung over the tail of the pool on the far side. I cast  
over the place many times without result. There was a stone close in  
shore which the fly had passed by a few inches again and again. At  
last it dropped just above, and floating down just grazed the rock,

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when it was taken at once. This trout must have seen the fly, but he was not inclined to accept it until it floated over his nose. The puzzle is, why did he leap unless at something flying above the water? This leap showed the muscular strength of the fish as the water was only a few inches deep at that point. I should say that it cleared the surface by at least eighteen inches. I have occasionally seen large brown trout jump when the water was muddy during a freshet, but never did any good fishing for them at such times. Possibly they might have been taken with bait, but I fancied they were leaping in sport or just for a breath of pure air and to clear their gills of the impurities in the discolored water.

At least one-third of the good people who come to Sullivan county take an interest in the fishing and it is one of the staple subjects of conversation. Many are not anglers of great experience, but they enjoy a day on the streams occasionally and the trout are the bait that lured them to this part of the country. The scare caused by a large number of anglers wading a small stream and casting a swarm of flies of all sorts and sizes with varying degrees of skill, no doubt protects the trout, except possibly the most youthful.

However, I know men who think the fish can be badgered into taking the fly. They go to a good pool and pound away until, as they say, a trout gets so angry that he takes the fly to get it out of the way or kill it. This is a modification of the thory of some salmon anglers. They say that the salmon feeds little or not at all in fresh water, and that it takes the fly in anger. It is tantalized or exasperated into trying to smash it. This idea was illustrated in a poem called the "Durham Ranger," published in *Forest and Stream* last year.

There is no doubt that a good part of the pleasure of the sport is found in talking and thinking about it. When we were young we usually enjoyed a wakeful night before the trout season opened or when we arrived on a good stream too late to fish the same day. We recall sadly disappointing days when, after much imaginary catching of big trout during the night, we have tramped and fished for miles with little or no reward. In May we were told that the trout in that particular creek (which we had traveled 300 miles to reach) never rose to the fly until July. We did kill one fish with the artificial fly,

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

but the stream flowed through virgin hemlock forest and there were many splash dams upon it which were used for sluicing logs. Having collected a quantity of these in the dam, and a good head of water having backed up behind it, the big gates would be thrown open and a perfect avalanche of logs and water would go rushing down stream, carrying everything with it. It seemed surprising that the trout were not either killed or scared to death by this performance. It is not surprising that they did not rise well until July. Doubtless all the timber in that region was cut out long ago and if the waters have been stocked by the State there is probably good fishing to-day. This was Young Woman's Creek, in Pennsylvania, a tributary of the Sinnemahoning, if I remember correctly.

### A NOTE FROM MR. THEODORE GORDON

[*The following is from one of R. B. M.'s editorials—Ed.*]

F. G.  
SEPTEMBER 7,  
1907

[REFERRING TO a suggestion, in one of his previous letters, for making the wings of Mayflies not of whole or trimmed feathers but of flat strips from a feather (as for a salmon fly wing), I had said that the result was a very useful fly, and suggested Egyptian goose as about the best feather I know for Mayfly wing. Mr. Gordon, writing on Aug. 19, says:—

“DEAR MR. MARSTON,—I have not had any Egyptian goose feathers, but they could be used in same way—that is, flat strips laid one upon the other—from each side of a nice broad feather. With good hackles and wings like this (well split) you can dry the fly perfectly with the fingers, stroking the fibres. In regard to knots, I got the ‘Turle’ from Mr. Halford’s book. Compare it with either the mechanical figure-of-eight or Mr. Pennell’s half-hitch jam-knot. I am afraid to use the latter with large eyes, but I believe that these knots are neater than the Turle. I have compared them all on bare cyed hooks. No doubt you are accustomed to using the Turle and tie it with great facility, but the mechanical method of making the figure-of-eight is quite as easy—that is, after you have made it a few times.

“We have had scarcely any rain for two months, and the streams

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

are very small. Poor things, they appear quite exhausted, trickling along in the middle of a broad expanse of stones. However, by going down one finds plenty of water in the big pools, and can pick up two or three large trout before dark. By fishing wet one can kill a brace or more at night, when he cannot see the rises at all.

"The air is cool and delightful, never a day without its breeze. One night last week, while New York was sweltering, we had a touch of frost. The great stone fireplaces in the inn are fine, and wood fires were nice to have this morning. Got caught in an awful storm on Saturday evening—thunder and lightning, soaked—killed five (four brown, one rainbow.) Wish that I had a Burberry suit or something as good. Our waterproofs are boardy—never wear them."]

### LITTLE TALKS ABOUT FLY-FISHING

F. S.  
FEBRUARY 1,  
1908

A YEAR AGO at this time we began to think of spring, and how we would enjoy ourselves when that charming season arrived. Truly, we had long to wait, as in this region we knew not the fickle goddess called spring until about the middle of the first month of summer. Human nature is optimistic, and despite experience we are again making plans for a perfect vernal season. We are thinking of fresh yet balmy breezes, clear-rushing streams and deep, dark pools flecked with foam. The widening rings made by rising trout are easily seen if we shut our eyes for a moment. The duns are sailing down like tiny yachts with sails erect, and the little caddis flies are struggling and skittering on the water.

Let no man bury the pleasures of anticipation. When we cease to look forward we grow old rapidly. Not that we would forget the pleasures of past seasons. Every good angler's brain is a storehouse of happy memories. Without these how could we paint pictures of the good time to come? Not that we expect anything wonderful in the way of sport, but we may reasonably hope for a few days when we shall be in tune with nature, when soft airs are rippling the bright waters, and the stream is neither too high nor too low. A few flies should be hatching out, just enough to keep the fish interested in what is going on at



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

the top and make them rise occasionally. We never forget the rare days when the big fish are feeding.

Last spring the weather was cold and the "time of the take" unusually short. The small insects did not appear until midday or later, and the rise was over by 3 o'clock. Odd fish were to be had by the strenuous angler all day long, but I did not see a good rise of flies and trout in the morning until the month of June. Sometimes when there are quantities of tiny flies on the water only the small trout will be feeding. Again, when not a rise is to be seen, good fish may be quite ready for business. However, the largest trout that I killed last year before the 1st of May were taken during a good rise of natural flies.

It is the constant—or inconstant—change, the infinite variety in fly-fishing that binds us fast. It is impossible to grow weary of a sport that is never the same on any two days in the year. I am fond of all sorts of fishing, in fresh or salt water, in the interior of the country, or on the coast, but trout angling takes a grip upon the imagination. It is more of a mental recreation than other methods. There is always something in question, something to discuss. In the mere matter of hooks alone there is much room for differences of opinion. Does anyone know the form of hook which is absolutely and always the best under all conditions for artificial flies? Sometimes I think I know, and then again I do not, and I have tried all of the forms known to manufacturers. Experience and skill will tell in the long run, but the element of chance plays a considerable part in angling. We can all remember instances when the tyro killed the best fish of the day. Many persons of limited experience think that all fishing is a matter of luck, and from this ancient belief arose the salutations, "Good luck" or "Good luck to you," and "What luck?" Good fortune is desirable in all our pursuits, and we have heard it said "that it is better to be born lucky than rich," but we have to attribute any marked success in fishing to skill and skill alone.

This is the reason why a few good trout killed under adverse conditions are fondly remembered after large baskets are forgotten. For instance, I often recollect the taking of three large fish one summer afternoon when the sun was bright and the water low. I please myself by fancying that not everyone could have caught those trout.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

The fly was one of my own patterns, dressed on a No. 14 hook, and this fact added to my pleasure, although it is quite possible that another fly tied by somebody else would have been quite as effective. The little ways that trout have are often quite puzzling and past finding out. An oval pool of fair depth in a small stream had been carefully fished on many occasions without stirring a fin until we happened along one day at about two of the clock. The first cast was rewarded by a rise and a large trout sprang into the air. This fish was extremely wild and thoroughly disturbed the pool, but we wished to investigate a little to see if it had companions. By crawling on hands and knees to the edge of a little bluff we were able to command the depths, as the light was just right, and were astonished by what we saw. My dear sir: there was a school of trout in that place—big fellows—at the upper end tapering away through various sizes down to little chaps on the shallows.

Two o'clock seemed to be their time for feeding. You might get one trout, possibly three, never more. I did not get a fish in the morning or late afternoon. A large tree stood upon the bank, and I fancied that there might be peculiar lights and shades over this bit of water.

One hundred yards lower down was a deep hole by a flat rock with quite a rush of water into it. The first time I saw the place my companion, who was in advance, declared that he had seen trout run up into it. He was right, but it was a long time before I was able to prove it. Then I killed two fish, one twelve inches, the other eighteen inches in length. We must not hasten to the conclusion that there are no trout simply because we cannot catch them. Big fish may haunt for years a large safe pool where there is good cover or hiding places for them. Their presence may be known to many people who exert their best endeavors to catch them, but it is a long time before they are reduced to possession. I have heard that between dawn and sunrise was the best hours for a jumbo trout. I have always intended to try this recipe, but never did. It involves getting up in the middle of the night, and a long tramp on an empty stomach.

By the way, it will scarcely be believed, I saw a woodcock swim one day. There was no mistake about it. There was a long quiet reach of the stream with little current and I was standing in the water

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

changing a fly. A big fat woodcock came out on the margin, and after walking about a little deliberately entered the water and oared itself across to the other side. I never saw a prettier sight, as the bird was not more than twenty feet away. I had stood like a statue from the moment it approached, and it paid no attention to me. Four woodcock were flushed during the day and a deer crashed away through the thick brush. We were very close, but were unable to catch a glimpse of the animal. The laurel was in bloom and the mountains exquisitely beautiful in the evening light, but O! the long drive in the darkness after we reached the valley. We were so overpowered by the slumber god that we almost fell out of the buggy. The man who drives is better off, as he has something to keep him at attention.

Did you ever hear of Toboyne tannery in the Blue Mountains of Pennsylvania? I struck the place during a storm, the water was very high and fishing useless, except in one small place at the head of a tail race. We killed eighteen large trout there and then went on in the rain. I always hoped to revisit the tannery as the stream was a fine big one, coursing down a narrow valley between high mountains. I wonder what it is like there to-day? There used to be fine fly-fishing near Newville in the Cumberland Valley. A big slow-flowing limestone stream, which in those days carried a heavy stock of native trout. Is it fished by any of the readers of *Forest and Stream* nowadays, or is the water closely preserved? There must be good angling in many of the tributaries of the Susquehanna River if any attention has been paid to restocking. Some of them should hold heavy trout. I wonder if Young Woman's Creek is any good at the present time? Once we begin thinking of fly-fishing the mind is like a runaway horse prancing over hill and dale and never quite ready to stop.



## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

### AMERICAN NOTES

F. G.  
FEBRUARY 22,  
1908

THE SILENCE OF the snows is over all the land, and the bright waters of our trout streams run almost black between icy banks. In our walks abroad we find a few living creatures—a jay, perhaps, or a few half-starved crows. Mother Nature is fast asleep, but will soon awaken and bestir herself. We do not object to this reposeful mood as we know that there is a good time coming. On a cold, bright day the wintry landscape is dazzlingly beautiful, and the air is full of ozone and tonic influence. We are stimulated to climb the hills for a more extended outlook, and certainly we are well repaid. The range of vision hereabouts extends to about thirty miles over a rough, broken country—the Catskills to the eastward, and Shawangunk Mountains south-east.

In January we begin to think about fly-fishing, and to look forward hopefully to the season which is not very far away. It is well to begin early or we may miss a good deal of anticipatory pleasure. There is much in this, you know. We wish to be as keen as mustard when the trout streams are open to us at last, and by combining a few recollections of the past with dreams of the future we can arrive at an eminently satisfactory state of mind.

I am much pleased to see Charles Kingsley's "Chalk Stream Studies" again. Years ago I found these sketches bound in a small, thin volume of modest brown, but have never seen them in this form since that time. I read two or three of them in old numbers of *Blackwood's Magazine* (was it?) at the old Society Library in New York. Would Kingsley's methods prove successful on the chalk streams to-day? Have the trout changed their tastes or have the anglers altered their practice? When a fly is presented floating and almost at rest it may be necessary to reduce the size very much in order (as Stewart puts it) to hide its artificial nature; yet we know that large Sedges are sometimes used successfully in the daytime. I presume that Canon Kingsley always fished the wet fly. Would a big Caperer kill nowadays

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

if presented in the same way? It would be very difficult to put such a fly on the water without alarming a shy trout.\*

It appears to have been necessary to reduce the size of the chalk stream flies considerably since the use of the dry-fly became general.† In my copy of "A Book on Angling," Francis Francis advises the use of hooks from No. 12 (or 14) to 8, or 1 to 7 of the new scale. He dressed an imitation of the Iron Blue Dun on a No. 12 hook. These are the same sizes that are used for wet fly fishing on the old streams in the Eastern States.

The sizes of flies and patterns as well vary to an extraordinary extent in the United States, and this is not surprising when one considers the vast extent of the country, the difference in local conditions, character of the streams and lakes, and weight of the fish to be taken.

I have seen tiny English Duns used successfully in one place, and great staring combinations of colour in another. However, the small flies may come in when least expected. I remember arriving at a Maine lake about midday on a hot day in June. Not a zephyr had touched the water for several days, and fly-fishing had been an unprofitable pursuit with the flies commonly in use. A middle-aged woman, who had been assisting the camp-keeper, was going home, and was very anxious to carry a box of trout with her. It was her last day, and she appealed to me as soon as I appeared. When the shadows began to lengthen, I paddled slowly across the lake, and presently saw the dimples made by rising trout quite near the shore. That the fish were taking small insects was quite evident, and looking over my book I found a few modest little flies. Mounting a fine casting line and approaching cautiously, I found no difficulty in taking the trout, which were placed in a floating trap. This was towed to camp, and presented to the woman, who was greatly pleased. I think that she counted thirty-eight trout when she packed her box with ice.

\* [It is all right if you do not drop it to near his nose, only the fly should be dressed on a fine wire hook like a Mayfly hook.—R. B. M.]

† [I think there is no doubt anglers are now more careful to use flies near the size of the natural fly than formerly, and that the average size of fly used is considerably smaller; and this is the case also on waters where the use of the wet fly still prevails. All the same, where a water has been well flogged with very small flies, I have often found a bigger fly taken with more confidence.—R. B. M.]

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

There is scarcely a feather or colour in even the most gaudy salmon fly which cannot be matched in the insect world. We take our salmon fly and gaze upon it at a distance of a few inches. We really pick it to pieces. That is not the way the fish see it. To them it appears a harmonious whole. Their round eyes are inferior to ours in distinguishing form; but we can get a better idea of the appearance of the flies in the water by hanging up a few at a distance of six or eight feet.

I knew a successful salmon fisher who always tied the flies he used. His Jock Scots, Silver Doctors, and other fancy flies had very few feathers in them, but he got the effect, and killed his fish. In Jock Scot he used a little seal's fur instead of toucan. The wings were of turkey feathers, with a little grey mallard, no blue chatterer. In fact, the only expensive feathers he ever bought were golden pheasant crests.

A small Black Fairy (not unlike Kingsley's Black Alder) is a favourite fly with many anglers when the salmon have been up for some time. I have seen them tied on 10 and 12 doubles (old style numbers), and many other flies as small. In "Angling Sketches" it is recorded that three stale salmon were killed with a gold-ribbed Hare's Ear on oo hook. What were the beginnings of salmon fly-fishing? Probably the sight of rising fish and the taking or hooking of a few with trout flies. I would like to preserve a little of the romance and fascination of fly-fishing for salmon (for my own use, at least). An enthusiast like Mr. G. M. Kelson, with his imitations of gaudy moths and many theories in regard to flies, gets far more pleasure out of the sport than the man who uses nothing but "lures." \*

An American angler, George Dawson, would not sink his fly at any time. He insisted on having the glorious thrill of the rise to a fly played upon the surface. He caught fish, too, and some big ones. Getting the fish is not everything.

The trout were very late in putting in an appearance on the spawning beds last year. Their instinct must have informed them that severe cold weather would be deferred. Snow came early, but the mercury

\* Hear, hear!—R. B. M.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

has not been very low, not much below zero before the middle of January.

I presume that an American tourist making a short stay in England during the spring or early summer months, and wishful to witness a little first-rate dry-fly work on a chalk stream, could not do better than pay a visit of a few days at Winchester on the Itchen. Scotland is attractive to many, but there are others who would be glad to see a past-master of the dry fly at work in the South of England, even if unable to wet a line on their own account.\*

My query, months ago, in regard to the floating gut line, or casting line, brought out a few replies in the *Fishing Gazette*, but there seemed to be some difference of opinion. If a floating casting line sometimes puts the trout down on water that has been little fished with dry fly, I should think it would be a serious handicap on a chalk stream where the trout were very shy. My observations were made on pools having a gentle current, and when there was little air stirring. Fine Refina gut was used. Would fine drawn have helped matters? I have it down to xxxx, and what is called "cobweb" gut. Where there was enough ripple on the water to hide the connecting links between line and fly from my own eyes, I had fair success with the trout. They were rising fairly well, but not in great numbers, on both of the occasions I have in mind.

The thickness of the gut used in some parts of the country is remarkable, and in early spring, when the water is high, the trout are not very particular. A few beautifully tied flies were sent to me last season from a Western State. The hooks were No. 8 and No. 10 (old style), but the gut might have brought a large salmon to gaff. On making inquiries as to the reason for this, I was given to understand that the anglers in that region did not care to trifle with their fish. Native fishermen often use heavy gut and coarse flies, and this is probably one reason why many of them give over angling quite early in the season.

On a mountain river, where it may be a difficult matter to follow

\* I would do my best to get any friend of Mr. G.'s a chance to try our dry-fly fishing, as well as to see it done.—R. B. M.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

one's fish down stream, drawn gut is rather a nuisance, and its use results in the loss of our best fish.

The modern light rod is a more powerful weapon than the old wood rod of seven or eight ounces. The favourite length for these was about twelve feet, and they were quite pliable. There was little danger of a smash in the tackle from a hard strike, but they were rather easily broken by a hang-up behind. A split bamboo of best quality of seven ounces or more is now an immensely powerful tool, and requires a heavy line to bring it out. If one likes a large, comfortable handle and solid reel seat, he cannot have a very light rod.

How your streams endure the price of creeper, stonefly, worm and minnow fishing, common in some of them, is a mystery to me. The rivers of the United Kingdom must at one time have been as productive as any in the world. The *Fishing Gazette* reports of the sport they still afford are surprisingly good, yet many of them appear to be savagely netted. Man is a greedy animal in all countries, and is only too ready to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. We have been very busy at this business in the United States, but some really earnest efforts are now being made to check the march of destruction.

The rapid development of bait-casting with light rods, and the use of artificial lures (many of them quite new and unfamiliar), has enhanced sport in all parts of this country, and led to a great increase in the army of anglers, particularly in those regions where trout are not common. Some of the new baits are decidedly odd, or queer, affairs, and would be viewed with suspicion by the old-fashioned fisherman. They all kill in expert hands, although not equally well, and there is plenty of room for discrimination. How would your pike like a big wooden minnow?

Much has been written on the subject of tying salmon flies, but for practical instruction nothing I have seen has equalled Captain Hale's book. Yet I profited most by quite a short article written by P. D. Malloch, of Perth, many years ago for the *Fishing Gazette*. This



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

was wonderfully clear and easily understood. It is a great help to have some really first-rate patterns to copy, although rather discouraging at first.

We have had the finest sleighing it would be possible to imagine recently. Not too much snow, with a little sleet and rain to beat it down and make the roads hard and smooth. Unless one has snowshoes, and is accustomed to their use, deep snow makes getting about in the country very difficult. Yet few people have them here.

In an elevated region one must expect high winds at times, and when the temperature is low these are pretty trying. They get next to the person in spite of warm clothing. One blessing in this country is that we can get away from the cold weather. A journey of twenty-four to thirty-six hours by rail will carry us to a mild climate.

### BAD NEWS FOR TROUT FISHERS

**F. S.**  
**FEBRUARY 29,**  
**1908**

I AM SORRY to say that my worst fears in regard to the trout have been realized. Several days of mild weather followed by rain on Saturday of last week resulted in a sudden breaking up of the heavy ice and there is no doubt that large numbers of fish were destroyed. The ice was twenty inches to two feet thick and there was much snow upon the ground. A large portion of the latter ran off in a few hours, and this, with rain and high temperature, forced the ice to go out. Jams are said to have formed in many places, only to go out with a rush, and many large trout were killed. A brown trout that weighed about six pounds was picked up with its head crushed.

From the upper Delaware it is reported that the bass suffered severely. On some of the smaller streams the bulk of the flood water seemed to be passing over the ice and I had hoped that the cold change on Saturday night had come in time, although I had been anxious for several days.

We had very cold weather in January with temperatures down in part of the county as low as 28 below zero and the ice was very heavy. The Neversink, Willowemoc and Beaverkill have been affected and

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

doubtless all the streams within a large area. Trout in the small brooks and upper portions of the large streams suffered less than those in the lower waters, but many of the largest have been killed. I hope that the reports are somewhat exaggerated, but the freshet could not have occurred at a more unfortunate time, at least from a trout lover's point of view.

Last year the ruffed grouse (partridges) suffered and now I am afraid that the trout have had their turn. There had not been so many grouse for many years as there were in 1906 and a large stock remained at the close of the shooting season, but a cold, wet spring and probably an epidemic disease, resulted in poor sport in the autumn of 1907.

It seems to be a fact that whenever we have an unusually good stock of birds in the covers or fish in the streams, something unfortunate comes along to blast our expectations of good sport in the future. We will hope that the trout have pulled through a very rough experience much better than they are said to have done, but I greatly fear that many a noble patriarch has gone to his last account, never more to rise at fly or dash at minnow.

### A PENNSYLVANIA TROUT STREAM

[*Editor Forest and Stream*: In your issue of Feb. 1 Theodore Gordon in an article on fly-fishing makes inquiry as to a stream called Young Woman's Creek, a tributary of the West Branch of the Susquehanna, and wonders what it is like now, he having fished there, as he stated in another article, about twenty years ago.

I have fished this stream off and on for twenty-four years; also hunted along its course and its watershed at various times during that period. I have fished on all its branches as far toward the heads as I could throw a fly. When Mr. Gordon was on it twenty years ago the white pine lumber was being cut and driven down the stream. Large splash dams were on it and had even at that time injured it seriously as a trout stream; at least it was not nearly equal to its condition of primitive wildness when it was one of the greatest trout producers known in Pennsylvania. The log driving, sawmills and tannery at its mouth made it only an ordinary stream at that time. After the pine

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

was cut there was a short period of rest for the stream when it quickly recuperated and gave promise of being once again a great trout stream, but alas, the hemlock lumbermen took possession of it, built more dams to run the logs down, and when they got through, about six years ago, it had hardly any trout left in it. Since that time on one of the main branches the pulp wood lumbermen have been cutting what the hemlock people left, so that on the Green Lick branch there is at present not much but bare hillsides with the stream bed filled with gravel and mud.

The eastern or main branch is better, as the State has acquired most of its drainage area and is protecting it in a perfunctory way. Even on this part of the stream, which is about fifteen miles long, all the large timber has been removed but the banks and hillsides are rapidly growing up, so that if fires are kept out for a few years this creek will once again become a good trout stream.

As it is, Young Woman's Creek is probably as good for trout as any other open stream of its size in the State. For a distance of twelve miles from the forks at the oil pump station to Dyer's on the pike, there is not the sign of a human industry or habitation, barring Jim Dougherty's summer camp and Ernest Davis' cabin. In those twelve miles there are some nice trout holes and long runways of stream that hold some good ones.

Last year the fishing for some unaccountable reason was very poor. There were trout there, but wind, weather, water and the fly never formed that harmonious combination necessary to sell Mr. Spots an old brick from the fifteenth of April until the rattlesnakes got so thick it was not safe to tramp the stream. We all agreed that 1907 was blacklisted as a trout year, as it was for his worthy colleague, the ruffed grouse.

The season of 1906 was, however, a good one on this stream, many nice catches being made. I fished it one day from daylight until dark, catching lots of small ones and enough large ones of from nine to fourteen inches to fill the basket.—WORMAN.]



# THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

## AMERICAN NOTES

F. G.        THIS (FEB. 22) is the birthday of the immortal  
MAR. 21, 1908 Washington, who never, never told a lie,\* born  
1732.

Our trout streams in this part of the world had a terrible shaking up last week. The weather had been intensely cold in January; the snow lay deep upon the ground, when a change of wind to the southward brought mild weather, and on Saturday morning, rain. The result can be imagined. An enormous quantity of water ran off the frozen ground, every little brook was a torrent, and on Sunday morning the heavy ice went out with a rush. Ice jams were formed here and there, only to give way before the flood which was dammed behind them. Many trout were carried away and killed by the ice, or left stranded when the flood subsided. We feel rather gloomy in regard to sport this year.

I enclose herewith a salmon fly, tied by a very successful angler about twenty years ago. Doubtless the Editor will enjoy a hearty laugh at the expense of this creation, but it was a killing fly nevertheless. It is called the "Singed Cat," † and reminds me in some way of an enormous sedge fly with a brazen end to its abdomen. It might do well on rivers in the British Isles, if it ever had a trial, but it is not likely to have that. The Singed Cat is too quiet and unassuming, too much like the honest girl in the calico dress, to be appreciated on sight. Our modern flies are mostly gay beauties, attired for conquest in the most costly stuffs, as are fashionable women at a *bal masque*.

I am tempted to send, by way of contrast, two large trout flies from the far north-west. It is hard to realize that such patterns were used with great success for big rainbow trout in the large streams they have out there. The hooks are over an inch in length; the bodies silver and yellow; the wings are composed of bright black and orange feathers from the cock pheasant, with red streamers and golden pheasant crests. Golden crest tails over bright red butts are common

\* But he was an angler all the same.—R. B. M.

† It is all right—like a sober old Tweed fly.—R. B. M.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

to both flies, and altogether they are as gay as they can be. I do not think that we would enjoy casting such flies with a light trout rod. They would seem to demand rather heavy tackle throughout. [Mr. G. forgot to enclose them.—R. B. M.]

We have had old-fashioned weather since the New Year began. January was cold enough to satisfy any reasonable person. One morning the mercury in the glass stood at 28 degrees below zero. It is said that there is but little wind in the Swiss mountains in winter, but up here it is always breezy, if not blowing half a gale. The wind gets right next to you sometimes. I often carried an oil stove down to breakfast with me in order not to freeze. How can one eat when his teeth are chattering like castanets? I like fresh, pure air, but when the draughts are so fierce that they threaten to blow one's hair off, it is best to change your seat.

I had a line from an old chum last week describing the excellent fly-fishing for black bass in the upper Mississippi River. This is far above the mouth of the muddy Missouri; the water is perfectly clear, and the scenery very fine. The fish are the red-eyed small-mouth black bass, and average well in size. The largest my friend has killed with artificial flies ran up to four pounds and a half. A fly he sends me is peculiarly ugly, and the colours in it remind me of the Hellgramite or Dobson.

Not many people seem to have noticed the peculiar odour of the black bass. It is not at all like that of any other fish, and is not at all unpleasant. It will cling for a time to any creel or basket in which the bass have been carried.

The small-mouth has more strength and far greater vitality than its big-mouthed cousin, although the latter affords good sport in its own waters. I have carried the former considerable distances without water, when not exposed to the sun, and the whole catch has recovered when placed in a fountain. These fish lived for some time, but the water in the fountain was too shallow for them to thrive. Pickerel, the common pond pike, did well until the heat of summer, then they died.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

A bass weighing five pounds rose at a large speckled frog, but refused several little frogs that were tendered for his acceptance thereafter. Then I hunted out a big green frog from under a board in the bottom of the boat, and placing it upon the hook made a cast in the same place. This bait was taken at once, and after a fine contest the fish came to net. But it is not always the biggest mouthful that tempts the finest fish.

Mr. Percy Wadham tells us something of the author of "Stray Notes on Fishing and Natural History," in a recent issue of the *Fishing Gazette*. This is a delightful book and may be read again and again.

There is an old book called "Salmon Fishing in Canada," which was published, I think, about 1854. It was written by an Irish gentleman, a parson, I fancy, who emigrated to this country. It is in this work that the famous old story of poor Martin Kelly, of Dublin, and the "Fiery Brown" is told. It is full of life and fun, and well describes the sport to be had in those days, free, in the rivers of the north shore of the St. Lawrence River. The book also holds a fine sermon and many amusing epitaphs.\*

To thoroughly enjoy this region in winter a man should own a pair of snowshoes and be familiar with their use. To tramp through deep snow in boots is extremely fatiguing, particularly in the woods where it accumulates, not being much exposed to the sun. It is stupid work walking in the roads, and even there the going is bad. In the timber one finds the tracks made by many small animals; racoons appear to be fairly numerous, but foxes are not very abundant this season. The lynx, called bobcat or wildcat, was formerly not uncommon, but I have not heard of one being killed this winter. The country is rapidly being denuded of all the good timber that is to be found scattered here and there. The woods are shrinking and so are the streams. When I first came to Sullivan County, many years ago, the Neversink River was a fine bold stream even in summer. About the only place

\* Curiously enough, I got my wife to write out that amusing story of the "Fiery Brown" for me, and it appeared in the *Fishing Gazette* of March 7.—R.B.M.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

one could wade across was where a rapid poured into one of the pools; just there the water was most shallow, but the force of the current was so great that it was a difficult, and sometimes dangerous, matter to cross without being carried away into the deep water below. One fine young man lost his life in this way less than twenty years ago. Nowadays, in the same spots, we can often pass over without getting wet above the knees. The river shrinks to a mere brook in midsummer. Last year many small trout died for want of water in the little runs and tributaries. It is to be hoped that in the Mother Country you are more far-sighted, and are not so fond of killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. Here *progress* is rapid. We will soon have no forests to cut, or would not have had if reforms recently inaugurated had not been considered.

A correspondent on your side of the Atlantic sent me a few charming little flies of his own tying. They are dainty fabrications, and must be very close to Nature in size and colour. I thought for some time that your "Tup" was an angler of distinction, who had evolved the secret of that wonderful dubbing from his own inner consciousness. Now I am better informed. But why should a ram be called a "Tup"? I fancy that someone over here has tried to win fame for himself by attempting to put a "Tup's" body on a fly with a new name. At least, a pattern was sent to me in 1906 which gave me that idea. I will look it up and compare the dubbing again.

The weasel, which turns white in winter, has a summer coat which, I think, would make good dubbing. The colour is a pale yellowish brown, quite different from other animals of the same species. I have not been able to obtain one as yet, nor mink fur of the brown shade I like so much, although I have had a skin of the latter brought in to me. This was entirely too dark for our purpose.

Our blue jay is a smaller bird than the European, very handsome, but its feathers are not particularly tempting to the fly maker. I know two species—one is the Canadian jay, and the other is found well to the southward in winter. In fact, I remember seeing the bird in Georgia during warm weather, but forget the date. The large white

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

owl is occasionally found there during the cold weather. I saw a fine mounted specimen yesterday. The plumage is beautiful. There is a species called the silver owl at the south, which is also a very handsome bird.

I found a genuine old-fashioned "bob" to-day which had been mislaid for a long time. This was given me by an expert at fishing with this curious bait, and I know that he killed large southern black bass with it. It is made of the hair of a buck deer, with a bit of scarlet silk showing well. A bit of lead is fastened on the shank of the hooks to give weight. The line used is very short, not over three feet, and this is tied to a long cane pole. Usually two men go in a boat, one to paddle and the other to manipulate the tackle. They coast along shore and enter the small bayous, and the fisherman skitters the bob about old stumps and logs, and into all the pockets or deep holes. The bass goes for the bait with a fierce rush, and is pretty sure to be well hooked. If not large the fish is at once dragged into the boat, the pole being taken hand over hand on account of the short line. I know that the maker of this bob killed a bass of eleven pounds on it, and he asserted that he had taken them of larger size than this. I fancy that the big fish would be apt to break away if held hard. The sport must be quite exciting, such as it is, but I preferred to stick to artificial flies used in connection with a stout fly rod.

The Indians of Western North Carolina are said to have made rough flies of deer's hair for the capture of trout in the mountain streams before white men settled in that part of the country. It is probable that fly-fishing was practised in England long before we have any record of it in books.

Old people have told me that the first flies they ever saw in this country were made of red cock's hackles, with a red body. They were tied on horsehair, several strands being twisted together. A man told me recently that the saddle hackles were preferred, so the flies must have been of large size.





## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

### LITTLE TALKS ABOUT FLY-FISHING

F. S.        THE VISION OF the trout is incredibly sensitive to  
APRIL 18, 1908    motion and to colors, but not to distinctions of form.

As to their sensitiveness to motion, it may be safely said that a company of soldiers standing motionless on the bank of a trout brook would not frighten the trout in it so much as the moving shadow of one of them across the water.

Their sensitiveness to colors is seen every week at the ponds where trout are domesticated, specially when their keeper changes a dark coat for a light one, or leaves it off altogether. The appearance of the unaccustomed light coat or white shirt will often frighten well-tamed trout into a panic. I know this from the work, "Domesticated Trout," by Livingston Stone.

Mr. Stone's experience was far greater than any angler would be likely to enjoy. He was a successful breeder of trout for years and speaks with authority. Yet we find men who believe that trout are color blind. I think it was Sir Herbert Maxwell who first gave this theory to the angling world. How any one who has had any considerable experience as a fly-fisherman can hold such an opinion is a puzzle to me. No round-eyed creature can have the clear impressions of form that the human animal enjoys, but again and again we have seen that fish are able to distinguish colors, one from another, or even different shades of the same color. For instance, if trout are taking a pale yellow natural fly steadily they may reject a darker yellow artificial, yet accept a better imitation in color, although only a hackle without wings.

Probably the most important lesson we learn in trouting is to keep out of sight. We cannot cast a fly without motion and even a shadow will alarm a trout. We soon learn how important it is to have the sun shining in our faces and not comfortably warming our backs. If obliged to fish in sight of the trout a good background is a help. Keep the rod low down with the side or underhand cast. With the rays of the sun striking the water obliquely at certain hours in the morning and afternoon, we can, if facing it, stand within easy casting distance of a school of trout and present our flies without alarming them. The fish may be lying in shallow water, but we cannot see them nor can they

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

see us. Under other conditions, or with the sun in our rear, they would take fright before we arrived within range.

It is delightful to find a stream which has long reaches of good water, well shaded by trees or high banks quite early in the afternoon. Sport may be had in such places when we could do nothing in the open until the evening hour. It is only in early spring, when the water is very cold, that bright sunshine is an advantage. Then a little heat will bring out the flies and make the trout more active. There are days when the sky is overcast that are apt to bring disappointment to the angler. The light is gray and hard and the atmosphere depressing. We cannot say just what is wrong, but we feel that the conditions are against us. Usually it is flat calm. If the wind is blowing we are soon driven off the water by stormy weather. This is much the best, as a change is desirable, and it is a waste of time to fish. However, we all know how hard it is to leave the stream no matter how bad the weather. We are always hoping for a change and hate to acknowledge that we are beaten; in fact, we work much harder when conditions are adverse than when they are favorable.

When a few trout have been stowed away in the creel, the strong desire to take fish is appeased; we are at peace with all the world and can wander on amicably, and at our ease, in full enjoyment of all the beauties of earth and sky. It is not human to be quite happy with an empty basket. I remember a trying afternoon when the sawdust was running and the lonely stream seemed barren of fish. Not a rise was to be seen. At last a large trout, as I thought, moved at the fly but did not touch it. How I labored over that fish. I changed the fly again and again, and rested the pool several times, but all efforts were in vain and I turned wearily toward home. Just then two minnow fishers appeared, and I sat down for a few minutes to rest and to see if one of them would succeed where I had failed. Sure enough, the minnow scored, and I confess that when I saw that bending rod I felt a little envious. I walked back to view a noble trout and arrived just in time to see a big chub taken from the landing net. I had spent at least an hour in trying to catch a chub, but I tramped away a good deal comforted that I had not killed a fish.

The light changes from day to day, atmospheric conditions are

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

rarely the same, even on consecutive days, and these changes have much influence upon our sport. The effect is apparent to our own eyes, as, in certain lights our artificial flies are not at all lifelike, or natural looking when on the water. At one time a fine leader is invisible or almost so; at another it shows up like a cod line. We fish with little confidence unless things look right to us. Most men who fish after dusk in the evening prefer dark nights, and from my own somewhat limited experience, I should say that bright moonlight is unfavorable to sport. If out on a bright night I always face the moon and fish into the deep shadows. On the darkest nights trout appear to see objects on the surface quite distinctly. Whether they can distinguish colors, one from another, I do not know. The author of "The Angler and the Loop Rod," who fished through the long summer nights on the Clyde and Tweed for a livelihood, claimed that they can do so. This man used nine flies in day and six flies in night angling, and he states that sometimes his entire catch of twenty to thirty pounds of trout would be killed on one particular fly, the other patterns on the long leader failing of attraction. One can get quite close to his fish at night without being seen, and they seem to be unsuspicious. If much disturbed, however, they will soon become wary of the artificial fly.

I doubt if it is sportsmanlike to fish at night, although I admit the temptation when the water is low and large trout are known to be about. There is something fascinating about the business, and I love to be in or near the stream on a fine summer's night. The air should be warm and quiet, little or no breeze, with lots of insects in the air and on the water. A little cold wind will often stop the rise at once, yet I have known trout to rise well on a chilly evening. It is difficult to measure distances accurately at night and one is apt to find that he is casting a longer line than is necessary or advisable. We may be forcibly reminded of this by hooking the tail-fly in the brush overhanging the further bank. A smash at such a time is irritating as we have a poor light for making repairs.

One evening I was casting in a pool that was full of roots, driftwood and stumps, and quite expected to be hung up. After a time my fly was arrested and I was sure that I had a root. I pulled gently, first

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

one way and then the other, finally harder, straight up. Then the head of a big trout appeared, his mouth opened and the fly flew up in the air, there was a great splash upon the surface and I was left lamenting. How silly one feels after such a performance. This trout had annexed the fly quietly and settled back under a stump. A big fish may just suck the fly in and even when hooked may scarcely feel the barb in his tough old jaws. He lies there and is only passively resistant. It is easy to mistake this dead pull for something inanimate until the trout becomes alarmed and starts on a grand rush for freedom. I remember standing at the top of a pool with my rod bent in a half circle for what seemed a long time; then a great trout threw itself into the air and ran downstream over a low fall into the wide water below.

Occasionally brown trout of unusual size will sulk, and much patience, coolness and skill are required to land them on light fly tackle. Unfortunately these big fish are not so numerous as they were eight or ten years ago. At one time there were a few of them in nearly all the pools large enough to afford them shelter and a good hiding place. A *Salmo fario* of the yellow variety is a lovely fish, but some of the old trout become almost black from long hiding under rocks, etc. One of the most perfect fish I have seen in several years was a yellow lady weighing a little over four pounds. She must have lived much in a pool that was exposed to the sun, as she was very light in color. The under parts were golden yellow, the pink spots exceedingly bright. To perpetrate something of a bull—I wish that all brown trout were yellow trout. Anglers who are not familiar with these brightly colored fish have no idea how beautiful the *Salmo fario* is under favoring conditions.

It makes a man feel dismal to see the destruction of such timber as remains in this part of the country. Sawmills, pulp mills and acid factories are at work on or near every stream in whose neighborhood any trees worth cutting are to be found. When the sheltering woodlands have vanished from the hillsides and valleys we can only look forward to longer drouths at one season and heavier floods at another.



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

### LITTLE TALKS ABOUT FLY-FISHING

**F. S.**      **SOME OF OUR** large mountain streams show the effects of the flood and heavy ice last February. Jams of ice, which form, hold for a short time, and then give way with a rush, are very destructive. The course of the stream is often changed, pools are filled up and good holding places for trout obliterated. The tendency is for the rivers to become more torrential in character.

The flood not only affected the river and the fish, but carried away or covered up many of the larvæ which have their homes in the gravel of the stream bed or under stones. Consequently the natural flies have been in very light supply and made a poor showing. I have not seen a really large batch of water-born insects this season and have heard of only a few. When these appeared they were on the flats or pools where no great changes in bottom or form had occurred.

The scarcity of insects has detracted a good deal from the pleasure of fishing. I have this season secured but a single specimen of the large brownish ephemera which were plentiful at one time on the Esopus. I fancy that some species do not appear regularly every year, and that others require special conditions of weather or water to hatch out in great numbers. There is nothing more interesting than trying to hit it right when the trout are really busy feeding upon a particular fly. There are days when they will accept almost any good flies, but again they have the color down fine and pay not the slightest attention to your poor counterfeit. Then, indeed, you may regret it if you have neither bought nor tied an assortment of small flies you know should have been at hand. In an hour or two you may have sport that will compensate you for much ill fortune and remain a pleasant memory for years. Last season I had several experiences of this kind. This year not one opportunity. One afternoon this week I loafed agreeably by a large deep pool, waiting for developments, while the shadows gradually crept across the water from the high wooded bank upon my side. At last a few fish began rising very gently. I feared that they were small, but sometimes large trout give this idea when taking tiny insects. I must have wasted considerable time before I had my reward,

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

and that was poor enough. They were small native trout, and after returning a couple I adjourned to another pool. It is discouraging to find baby trout at work where big chaps should be. In the next pool I saw but two rises in an hour, but these were decent fish.

There is one stout fellow at the pool's foot, but he lies away down in the shallow and is mighty easily scared. As I reposed against a sandy bank a brother angler came from below, casting his flies steadily, but in a prefatory manner. It was easy to see that he was discouraged. He told me that it was the only day he had had this season. He knew that there had been much fishing and that it was one of the warmest days ever known hereabout in June. Yet he had hoped. His fancy had painted a charming picture of bright waters and sportive trout. I trust that he was successful in the evening when that blazing sun was hidden behind the western hills and the air was cool and restful. A few trout then would send him home in happy mood. He had no idea of quitting, but had little hope. To thoroughly enjoy a day by the brook or river one should have a little success; some measure of sport early in the day. With half a dozen good fish in the creel the mind is at rest. The trout are there. We have proved it, and we can take more interest in the beauty of our surroundings.

The muskrats are here, but where are they? There are few places for their retreats. I have seen more of them in September and captured one in a large landing net years ago.

I will try the Beaverkill next week, but do not expect to have much sport. Day by day the streams are falling. We have not had a hard shower for two weeks. The Neversink is an ambitious river and wishes to occupy the whole valley. In the last few years it has carried away much meadow and other land when in flood. The consequence is that when the water returns to normal level vast expanses of stones and gravel are exposed with a comparatively small stream flowing in the neighborhood. Over these cobbles and rocks the tired fisherman stumbles and staggers in heavy waders. I stubbed my toe and fell heavily yesterday.

There were many fishermen this year. Some men sit in a barroom all day, after engaging a couple of local anglers to fish for them. Their ideas of what constitutes sport are peculiar, but they usually return

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

to the city with a large number of trout. Doubtless they enjoy a fine reputation at home. Greed and the spirit of competition should have no place on the trout stream. It is amusing, however, to see a number of men trying to get ahead of each other and to fish all the best water first. We are not here to run foot races or to get the best of the other fellow. Take it easy, fish slowly and very probably you will have as much success as anyone. A decent bait or minnow fisher will probably ask you to precede him. He knows that your fly-fishing will not injure his chances, while his methods will spoil sport for you.

I am sorry that quite a number of anglers were disappointed this season, but it is not surprising when one remembers how many visitors there were and the large number of trout killed in a short time. At last the skies are overcast and a gentle rain is falling. This will benefit all growing things and freshen up the streams if it continues.

### LITTLE TALKS ABOUT FLY-FISHING

F. S.      THE LONG DROUTH has been broken by a smart  
JULY 18, 1908      shower and we hope for more rain. The trout streams  
are very low and sport has not been good. One old gentleman spent some days on a preserved lake and returned home with thirty-four pounds of trout. For this success he paid at the rate of fifty cents per pound. The heat at times has been intense and we had two uncomfortable nights, not a common experience in Sullivan County. It is said that the hay crop is ruined, a serious loss in a dairy country.

On Saturday afternoon I was moved to lead a forlorn hope, as it was my last day on the Neversink. En route to a big pool, I passed a bait angler who stated that he had not had a bite. This was not encouraging. The pool was now curtailed of its usual fair proportions, and for two-thirds of its length resembled plate glass. Not the vestige of a ripple disturbed its surface. A trout rose once in this quiet water, but many casts with the artificial fly resulted only in a half-hearted rise. At the top of the pool, where the white water still rushed and eddied, a few baby fish of some kind were moving. We fished up and down; we reclined at ease and waited for a rise. Time was flying, yet

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

still there was nothing doing. The sun dropped behind the hills, the air was fresher and a few flies began to appear. At last I saw a rise in fairly deep water near the rocks on the opposite shore. We fairly yearned to basket him, although we had been too lazy to bring the big brown creel we usually carry. Wading in below, the tiny fly was dispatched upon its mission. Once, twice, three times it danced daintily with the current; the fourth trip was the charm. A large fish rose boldly, seized the fly, and feeling the hook, raced madly down the pool. We do not resemble that Highland laird who, when he had hooked a salmon, lost interest in the matter and handed the rod to his gilly to play and land the fish. To us this is most exciting. The leader was made of thinnest gut, the last three feet of fine drawn. To the end of this the hook was tied by that best of all knots, the old figure of eight. At last he wearied, and was escorted ashore. What a picture on the green grass! Over two pounds? Well! I should say so. "What a long story about catching a little fish!" Do not forget, my friend, that it has been a poor season for big trout, also that everything depends upon the locality and attending conditions. A great success in one place is small potatoes in another.

The Beaverkill is low and the water much warmer than it should be. The river has been hard fished in this neighborhood and I fear that even in the most strictly preserved water trout are not so numerous as they were last year. It is two years since I fished this part of the stream and I notice a good many changes. A man who knew the river well ten years ago would scarcely recognize some portions of it to-day. As to sport, one cannot expect very much. I fished five hours yesterday for five trout (one very handsome specimen) and innumerable "fall fish." This was a chub day. They seemed to be everywhere, but particularly in slow flowing rather deep water. They rose like trout and the hook took firm hold upon their leathery mouths. It is impossible to shake them off without breaking something. I broke the hook in a killing fly which had a rare and beautiful hackle on it in trying to extract it from the nose of a big chub. I basketed three of the largest and returned about two dozen. I hated to kill them, but they were better out of the stream. They must consume much of the food which should go to feed the trout. The habits of the chub are very similar



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

and they take everything that the trout do. Big chub will feed on minnows, and I am afraid that these are not as plentiful as they used to be in the Beaverkill.

I have seen two black bass in one of the large pools. One of them a fish of half to three-quarters of a pound. Years ago I feared that bass might work into these pools and do much damage if they attained any great size.

With lower temperatures of air and water yesterday there was a fair hatch of insects later in the afternoon. These were largely ephemeridæ, duns and spinners with a few stone flies and caddis. The common stone fly is a large insect. The female particularly makes a big show when on the wing. They appear, whenever the conditions are favorable, all through the season.

A few whacking big spinners were in the air, but the flies on the water were mostly small duns and midges. We fished for three hours without a rise except from chubs, but had fair sport after the flies came on.

We have no great successes to report this season. Occasionally we have had a bit of pretty sport which it will be pleasant to remember, but we are fond of reading about fishing and days spent on the beautiful streams in the trout country. This must be our excuse for chronicling small events. For instance, all anglers will recall similar experiences when we say that yesterday we found three really good trout rising close together and were able to take them all. We killed only eight trout, yet it was a fascinating bit of sport.

## LITTLE TALKS ABOUT FLY-FISHING

F. S. I WISH THERE were more long, deep pools on these  
AUGUST 8, 1908 rivers. Trout soon become shy in quiet water and are harder to delude. Then the big pools hold fish through drouths and hot weather and serve as refuges for the large trout. The latter become wonderfully keen in the matter of self-protection. About ten years ago a wide, rather shallow pool on the Neversink held two enormous trout whose behavior was amusing and exasperating. They usually lay near the lower end, and by careful stalking might be ap-

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

proached within casting range. But drop a fly on the water, be it ever so lightly, and they fled as if the devil was after them. They paid no attention to midges with finest drawn gut, but even these had to be very carefully manipulated. The slightest bungle in the cast and they were gone.

We fished for weeks that summer, trying to inveigle an old corker which was always at home and enjoying two bitter disappointments. The first time there was no barb on the hook and the second it lost its hold at the last moment, just when victory was about to perch upon our rod. The old sinner did not get scared and fatigue himself by wild rushes or leaps. He just kept away near the other shore, and at last allowed us to tow him slowly down stream. He looked fine sailing through the clear water, but it was not so agreeable to see him swimming slowly back to his hole, after he had recovered his liberty.

I always think of this trout as an "old he," but he may have been a she, and should have been described as an "it." The grammatical construction of fish stories is not always of the best.

## LITTLE TALKS ABOUT FLY-FISHING

F. S.  
OCTOBER 24,  
1908

THE ANGLER IS always an optimist. He lives upon hope and dreams of the future. There is so much in the way or style in which fish have been caught. I recall two afternoons, for instance. On the first, in an almost primitive wilderness, trout were superabundant, but rather small. The main camp was short of fish and we killed 119 in a very short time.

The second memory is of a hard fished stream, possessed of great natural beauties, and flowing in a region where black flies and mosquitoes are practically unknown. Our surroundings were almost ideal, and by hard work and with fine tackle, we killed three large trout. In the retrospect we find much greater pleasure in the latter event when only a few shy fish were taken.

There are not many places where we can study the habits of trout amid natural surroundings. The long shallow pool which I enjoyed so much has filled up and there are but two trout in it. This is a great disappointment, but I have had a little amusement elsewhere. One

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

morning I located a small-mouth black bass of something less than one pound in weight, which seemed to be very alert. Keeping under cover, I looked about for something to offer him, but found only the white butt of a cigarette. This was tossed upon the water about two feet from the fish, which rose at once and took it in. He swam down stream about two yards and disgorged the smelly object, the paper wrapper loosened and grains of tobacco were liberated. Then two chubs sucked the white thing in, in their turn. It disappeared entirely from sight when either of the fish had it—which would indicate that none of them had much sense of taste.

This incident may throw a little light on the occasional acceptance of strange and unnatural flies or lures. If a piece of string had been attached to that butt not a fish would have touched it. I have seen men and boys trying to catch them with bait and flies.

Life is full of disappointments, and so is a trout stream which holds the silver chub or fall fish. One day I had fished a long reach of shallow water with small profit, before arriving at a sweet pool of considerable depth. I approached this cautiously, and throwing a long line, placed the fly just where a big trout ought to lie. Sure enough there was a dimple on the surface, and in a second the weight of a heavy fish doubled up the rod. My heart actually thumped with delighted surprise, but there was something wrong with the play. "A lazy old beggar," I thought. Alas! the uncertainty was all too short, an enormous chub, the biggest I have seen in many years, rolled and wolopped on top of the water. Of course, he was landed all right. You can't lose a chub, no matter how hard you try.

Another time I fished the evening rise. The water was as warm as the air; the river was dead. One small trout was returned to grow in weight and wisdom. Next day seemed hopeless, so I called first upon Major Woodcock. I found a nice place for him, good cover and fair feeding, weeks ago, but he arrived quite recently from parts unknown. Sure enough he was at home, but taking his afternoon nap, and was considerably upset when I almost fell upon him. The Major is in full feather and the little sabres in his wings ring out sweetly as he flies away. This is the first woodcock I have seen near the Beaverkill.

It was very hot on the stream, but presently I found a bit of water

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

that was in shade. It seemed perfectly senseless to go on casting over the shallows in that glaring sunshine. I never caught a trout in this place in my life, but never mind, it was delightful to be out of the glare. By the way, beware of those stiff-winged flies that spin in the air behind you in the back cast, particularly when using fine gut. I had tried one of these the last thing on Saturday and the cast had twisted badly. It was probably a chub, but something went off with nearly the whole of my leader in the still water at the tail of the pool. Well, I put up a fresh gut line with a midge-sized quill Gordon ready on the end of it, and proceeded to cast a long line upstream—for more chubs, presumably. Suddenly a big fish shot up from the bottom, a yard or more from the fly. I could see its whole broad side as it rose. A gentle strike, then a heavy drag at the rod, and the reel gave out line rapidly as the trout rushed away. I began to abuse myself. "What a fool you were to use a midge; a No. 12 hook would have held him much better. He will be sure to break that drawn gut. It is ten years old and fine as a woman's hair. Where the dickens did such a trout come from and what is it doing here?"

But what a delightful bit of sport to come to a hopeless man in hopeless weather. Again and again I had the trout almost safe only to have it rush away strong as ever. The tiny hook was well home, but it was a great relief when I had that fish laid away in coarse grass. Of course I began again very carefully, although I expected nothing more in the way of sport. There seemed to be quite a lot of shy chubs in that pool. Now and then I hooked one. I would strike gently, then carelessly drop the rod to give them line. I wished to see if I could get rid of them on a slack line, but in every case had to reel them in. I imagined, you see, that I could differentiate the rises of trout and chubs and might have suffered for my nonsense, as you will see. Away off, near the top of the pool and close to the opposite shore, I had the chubbiest kind of a quiet chubby rise. I struck, then dropped the point of the rod, but away went the line down the pool. I released the reel just in time. "What an awful chub that must be." I waded down after the fish and presently it swung round in the shallow water, displaying the long clipper-built form of another big trout. I got him all right, but what a queer adventure. It was a well recognized poor place.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Probably that was the reason the fish were there. Nobody had worked it carefully as I happened to do.

### AMERICAN NOTES

F. G.  
OCTOBER 31,  
1908

THE SEASON OF 1908 seems to have been a dry one in the Eastern States, Canada, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, etc., since the month of May. Many salmon and trout anglers complain of unfavourable conditions, yet others report fair success in both branches of angling. In this part of New York many of the small brooks have dried up entirely. The heat was intense in July and early August, but recently the weather has been delightfully cool. The trout have been feeding to some extent, as the flies have been hatching out more or less extensively in the morning and late afternoon hours. Of course, the fish are very shy on this dead-low water, and have to be persuaded. They are willing enough to feed, but the fly or bait must be presented just right to coax them out of their hiding places.

A brown trout, said to measure  $29\frac{1}{2}$  in., was killed up the river last week, and I know of at least four fish of about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  lb. each being taken on the artificial fly, but it must be confessed that the average size of the trout caught has been less than usual. I think that I have returned more fish than in any year since the brown trout were introduced. One morning I put back eleven out of eighteen; all were of "legal" size, but a *fario* of less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. is scarcely worthy of a place in the basket.

Confidentially, I would rather catch big chub with dry fly. It is better sport, as in cool water Mr. Chub often pretends to be a trout. I presume that a past-master of the dry fly would look down upon my method of dry-fly fishing in a dead-low water. The trout are in hiding, of course, and you must know or imagine exactly where they are. The fly must be placed just right the first cast, as the least bungle will scare them, and they will rarely come any distance for it or rise more than once. I use a quill on a No. 14 (no. 1) hook, with a tapered casting-

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line of fine gut as long as the rod. The last 3 ft. are of fine-drawn stained olive. Sometimes you see the trout rising quietly at naturals close against their holt, but more frequently you must know by instinct that they are there, peeping out and scanning closely anything edible that passes within their ken. The fly will hold its own with other baits except minnow.

Recently there has been a good hatch of a small fly resembling a dark English Red Spinner. The Jenny Spinner is much the same as yours, but not as bright. The wings are clear, dark dun, held closely together, and the whisks are three in number. As usual at this season the flying ants are numerous on and near the water, particularly in the late afternoon about sunset. Trout and chub feed upon them freely. The old tip given by that veteran angler, H. R. Francis, should be remembered at such times. A small lead-winged Coachman is very successful, yet seems but a poor imitation.

I was amused recently when an angling friend informed me that the birds were taking many of the "Quill Gordon" flies in the air after they rose from the water. This reminds me of those large hatches of Pink Wickhams which were reported by an observer some years ago. A well-known fisherman and guide used to claim that *he* invented the Wickham, and was surprised when informed that the Wickham had been used all over the world years before he first saw one. I must show him the photograph of Dr. Wickham in the *Fishing Gazette*. On some of our waters this fly should be dressed with pale ginger hackle and light-coloured wings. It kills much better than the usual pattern.

The forests on the mountains about us are already showing the first tints of autumn; very soon they will be gorgeously coloured. The prolonged drought with the cold nights of the last ten days are responsible for the early changes in the foliage. A season of great beauty is approaching, but the summer tourists and "boarders" are flocking back to the city, in spite of the hot weather usually experienced there in September. Many are not compelled to do this, but resemble sheep—a few start for home, and then there is a general exodus. I must con-

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fess that it is rather dismal to be left almost alone in a large hotel or boarding-house which has been crowded to its uttermost capacity during the month of August.

I expect to visit among the small-mouthed black bass of the upper Delaware River. This is a splendid stream of rapids and long deep pools. The native name for the latter is "cddies." I shall succeed or fail, survive or perish, with the artificial fly, and have an abundance of materials with me for the making of a variety of patterns. A black fly is good where bass take hellgramites, "Bumble-Puppy" where they take minnows. "Lord Baltimore" hackled down the body and ribbed with gold or coarse black silk is excellent. The "Bucktail" seems to kill more or less everywhere. Why do you not introduce the black bass into English waters? \* In places where the water is not good enough for the small-mouth, the big-mouth bass, his own cousin, would be almost sure to thrive. The latter often do well in shallow, weedy ponds, which are full of algæ, and become much heated in summer; but the former require deeper, cooler water, with rocks and gravelly shoals and reefs. I was sorry to read that you had given up the noble striped bass or rockfish as an addition to the game fish of your coasts and estuaries. The introduction of the striped bass into the waters of California was marked by great success, but I understand that in some localities they have suffered from excessive netting. No mention has been made of any damage to the migratory Salmonidæ—the young of the salmon and sea-going trout. These bass feed largely on crustacea, soft crabs, shrimps and prawns, lug and blood-worms. Personally, I have never seen them much above the tidal portion of the rivers, and they spawn in brackish water, not in fresh. I have seen them growing rapidly in a fountain which had a constant supply of flowing water from a deep-driven well, but these fish were fed liberally on oysters, shrimps, crabs, and small salt-water minnows.

\* [I tried, with the late Marquis of Exeter and others, to introduce the black bass more than twenty years ago; at considerable trouble and expense we got fish from  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. to 1 lb. over, but they did not "catch on"—simply pined away and died. The late Herr Max von dem Borne, the great German fish-breeder and angler, and writer on fish and fishing, succeeded in establishing the black bass at his fish farms at Berneuchen, Germany, and we could easily get black bass from his place. I would gladly try the experiment again if I could get a few anglers to "join in."—R. B. M.]

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They were taken from the end of a dock in brackish water, almost salt.\*

In tournament work of any description special weapons and methods will inevitably be developed, but some of the old-time contests are very interesting. The first casting tournament that I remember was held in Central Park, New York, nearly forty years ago. The same rods and lines were employed that the anglers used in their fly-fishing for trout, and the first prize was won by R. B. Roosevelt, an uncle of the President of the United States. His rod was cedar of rare quality, and of the old-fashioned rather willowy pattern, which was long and light in weight. The lines were fine compared with those used nowadays for tournament casting. The best casts, if I remember correctly, did not exceed seventy feet, but it was a pretty sight to see one of the old-time experts at work. The movements were easy and graceful. Great force and muscle could not be used with such tackle without defeating the end in view.

That same rod went down to defeat in a halo of glory. Mr. Roosevelt was fishing for sea-trout on the Nipissiguit, or Metapedia, in New Brunswick, when an enormous salmon rose near at hand. A small salmon fly was hastily attached to the cast in place of the stretcher trout fly and placed before his majesty. Up rolled the salmon, the fly disappeared and the line paid out. Unfortunately, the reel was a small one. When the great fish realised the situation and rushed down stream, the line would not render freely or fast enough; the angler was placed so that he could not follow. There was a mighty surge, and the rod simply flew into a shower of splinters, leaving nothing but a stump. Then the line broke, and away went the salmon with three flies, the gut cast, and yards of the reel line.

The cedar used in this rod was very resilient and quick in action. It never warped, but was brittle. A modern split bamboo rod of the same weight would probably have won out in such efficient hands.

\* [I need hardly say I was very sorry to have to give up the idea of attempting to introduce the striped bass into our coastal waters, but as the Council of the British Sea Anglers' Society—our most important body of salt-water anglers—felt compelled, and not without good grounds, to decline to support the experiment, I did not feel justified in ignoring their views. It is quite possible that the striped bass might have damaged our declining salmon fisheries, by killing the smolts.—R. B. M.]



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With a quarter section rod, rind inside, I have seen beautiful work done by one of the old school of anglers. He had a knack, or art, of steeple casting, when there were obstructions or a precipitous bank behind him, that I have never seen equalled. How I used to long for my old friend's skill when I saw him take trout after trout from a large pool with a wall of rocks and ledges on the only accessible side! The fish lay about 60 ft. out next the ooze and quicksands.

When we reach middle age we begin to think much of those good old times before we had progressed quite so far towards perfection. We used inferior weapons, and were pretty well satisfied with them. I shot clay birds from traps, with a light, full choke, sixteen-gauge gun by Grecner. In those days a man stood at the line pretty much as he would in the field, and was obliged to keep the weapon below the elbow. I held my own pretty well then, but what chance would I have now?

There is nothing delicate about casting for distance with a modern tournament rod and heavy line. It requires lots of muscle as well as skill to bring all its power into play. I think that we will be content to look on and admire, when we have an opportunity. We will just doddle along the streams, using the wrist cast mostly, shooting the line, and making things so easy for ourselves that we hardly realise that we have been casting at all. I must not forget that if we use one of those miserable little handles on our rods, the grasp of the right hand will be cramped and rusty. Why sacrifice one's comfort to save a little weight?

I have caught my last trout in 1908. The season is over, and, possibly, we shall never have another chance. We are grateful for past favours, but humbly beg a continuance of the same. If we dared we would pray for more big trout, and promise to be content with a few at a time. One a day will do if it is over 5 lb. The last day of August was warm, and we did not leave the house until nearly 5 p.m., after tying seven flies in a hurry. I think that this was the trouble—we had not allowed ourselves time enough to cover the water we wished to fish. We hastened, and when a trout rose we struck too hard. One leap or turn and the fish was free. We lost five good trout and several smaller ones, and only landed two little chaps, both hooked outside.

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Sadly we turned homeward in the gloaming, "skunked." This was not to be endured. We hunted out a little brownish moth, tied him on, and cast at the tail of a good pool. A rise, a strike—Eureka! he is hooked. I have him at last, a good trout, but it was a close shave; the hook fell out as soon as the line was slack. Just one fish, and no more, for eight or nine months. Anyone but a clumsy lubber would have had three brace to show.

Have you ever stayed at a place where a good many people seem interested in your sport and meet you to inquire about it? Sometimes one feels like creeping in the back way. Excuses do not help one at all. There is a reserved look upon the faces about us. They gaze upon us with accusing eyes. "What are you good for, anyway?" Somebody says, "Why, Mr. Van Bibber caught a lot yesterday." "A man killed three fish above here that weighed over 10 lb." You claim that these large trout were taken singly at considerable intervals, but that does not help you much. At last you retire, feeling that you are a miserable sinner, that you have injured everyone who likes trout for tea, and that you ought to be kicked.

Floating gut lines continue to worry me at times. I have given up greasing the reel line as I prefer pulling the fly under every time rather than scare the trout with gut that floats near the hook. In still pools one might as well throw in his hat and boots.

Brown trout give the best results in the large streams that become so warm in summer. It sometimes pays to introduce a few thousand rainbows. If they take hold at all, they increase and grow rapidly, and no fish affords better sport. I may be wrong, but I object strenuously to the unfair methods often adopted to take the very large trout. Every man's hand seems to be against them. I love to know that here and there one of these great trout is living contentedly. They take but a few of their own species. When hungry they go to the shallows and catch minnows, and do this with apparent ease. If on the feed, they will take a fly, if it is not too small, and is properly presented. A prolonged drought is very fatal to them, as their retreats are laid bare

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and hiding-places exposed to view. When the great dam near Shokan, in the Catskills, is completed, and all of that lovely valley becomes a great lake for the storage of pure water for New York City, then, indeed, the big brown and rainbow trout will have a safe retreat where they can grow to any size they please. Nobody can spear, snare, or shoot them.

I believe that if the air is absolutely excluded from it, silkworm gut of good quality will retain its strength indefinitely. I had a small round tin box with a cover that was very tight. In this I found a hank of fine-drawn gut, stained olive, which was sent to me, I think, by Hardy Brothers, ten or twelve years ago. It is as strong and good as ever it was, and I have been using it all summer. I only wish that I had a thousand gut of the same quality. I had a splendid hank from W. J. Cummins this year, not quite so fine, and I used this for the upper portion of the cast. It is quite a job to taper a leader nicely. We have a wonderfully cheap reel over here which is almost perfection for fly-fishing *when you happen to get a good spring*. It does seem stupid to use a poor brittle wire in the click mechanism. I have had three springs in one of these reels which just suits a favourite rod (9 ft. 6 in.). With a comfortable-shaped handle, this rod weighs 6½ oz. It might be a wee bit stiffer in the middle joint, but is certainly a remarkably good hooker. You can nail a rising trout when the current has made a great bow in your line. This may be doubted, but there was a big pool on one of the streams I have fished where the trout lay under the precipitous bank opposite. The strength of the stream was between the angler and the fish, which were very shy. It was seldom that anyone did much good there. You were obliged to throw a slack line to give the fly time, and the bow was bound to form before the fly floated over the trout. They were rising steadily, and I killed ten splendid fish, the best one 17 in. long. The next time I caught seven, one 16 in., but after that they got on to my little tricks, and I never basketed more than three, sometimes only one. There were lots of trout in that long pool, but they knew a thing or two. Wish I had a good photograph to send you. The hatch of natural flies has been unusually slim this season, probably due to the floods and heavy ice last

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winter, which must have killed or carried away millions of larvæ.

This county has been celebrated for its trout streams for nearly a century, but in the old days it was difficult of access. Now it is too easy, and thousands of people resort to it every summer. The angler does not care to have too much company. He does his best work when alone. Not that he does not enjoy the society of his friends, but it is absurd for several men to fish close together in low, clear water.

It is possible to have a glut of natural flies, but this great hatch is soon over, and the trout recover their appetites. I remember several articles in the *Fishing Gazette* that proved that good fly-fishing could be had all summer on streams that were not too heavily fished with natural baits. One correspondent reported good sport on the Tweed in August.

The brown trout have saved the situation over here, in the East, and the rainbow is doing well in a few places. By making inquiries and travelling about a little, one can find good fly-fishing for trout of respectable size, often in streams that were supposed to be almost worthless twenty years ago.

Men who take to dry fly seem to desire large trout, even if they do not get many of them. As one friend wrote to me:—"Where can I find a place where the trout will average 2 lb.—only a few per day?" To obtain this average we should have to go to the wilderness and fish wet, with large flies. I might advise him to take a water on the Test. I would like to have a hack at those Derg trout. Has anyone tried them with a first-rate pattern of the artificial mayfly—fished dry?

There are rivers in our own West where the rainbow trout are very large, but a correspondent informs me that big flies are required to induce them to rise. He sent me patterns resembling medium salmon flies, and assured me that he had taken forty fish in an afternoon from 2 lb. to 4 lb. weight. A lifetime might be spent in becoming familiar with the fly-fishing resources of this country and British North America, but one longs sometimes for a full season on the streams and rivers of the United Kingdom. We have read and heard so much about them, and our fly-fishing devices originated there. Many years ago our

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fly-rods came from England, and we have always imported flies.

By the way, I found two natural flies that were new to me recently. A Yellow Spinner with brown markings, clear laced wings, mottled legs, and long tail. The other was a big Brown Spinner, with a stout body, which looked as if it had been made in plates and varnished. The two legs in front were very dark brown, the other four of a queer light fawn colour; wings like crinkled glass, and two stiff white spikes, twice as long as the body, for tails. A most curious insect. The prettiest fly of all was a lovely blue dun, exquisitely formed and tinted. The body had a kind of soft bloom upon it—a perfect little beauty. A fine light brown sedge fly was hatching out a few evenings recently. The specimen I secured had an extra pair of wings mounted at the shoulders, which were quite erect, and could not be folded with the others. It may have been a malformation; unfortunately, it was the only one I caught.

At this season one misses the birds which were so abundant in the spring and greater part of the summer. You have another month of trout-fishing, and then the grayling, but I do not envy you so much if the bass will be considerate and accept my flies. Good luck!

### A LITTLE TALK ABOUT THE DRY FLY

F. S.  
APRIL 3, 1909

RECENTLY we have heard much talk of the dry fly and dry-fly fishing, and one would be inclined to fancy that this method of fly-fishing for trout was an art which had not been practiced to any extent in this country. As a matter of fact, it has been studied and utilized where the conditions favored that style of fishing by a great many American anglers. My attention was first seriously engaged soon after the publication of F. M. Halford's fine works in England. The first of these appeared, I think, in 1886, but the dry fly had been used successfully at least a quarter of a century earlier. In Thaddeus Norris' "American Angler," published in Philadelphia about 1860, there is a description of dry-fly fishing on the Willowemoc, in Sullivan County. The water was low and quiet and Norris could do nothing with the flies commonly in use. His

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companion, however, tied two flies expressly for the occasion, and by using a leader of the finest gut he was able to lay them so lightly upon the glassy surface of the stream that the trout rose and were hooked before the flies sank or were drawn away. The patterns used were the Grannon and Jenny Spinner.

Mr. Halford is a past master of his subject, but he writes more particularly for the benefit of English anglers whose field of action is found upon the placid chalk streams of the South of England. The practical lessons he teaches are most valuable, but require some adaptations when applied to the fishing of our mountain rivers.

The bacilli or microbe of the dry fly entered my system about the year 1889 or 1890 and the attack which followed was quite severe. I imported an English rod, dry flies, gossamer silkworm gut and all other prescriptions which I presumed were necessary to effect a cure. From the first I caught trout, a few of them, but my success was not great. My rod and line were unnecessarily heavy and caused me great fatigue. I never fished "on spec," only for fish that were seen rising at natural flies. My first enthusiasm had waned considerably, when one afternoon I had a little experience that was of service. I was fishing down stream with two flies. The water was not very productive, but a long gliding run gave promise of sport. Casting over this in my best style from top to bottom I was favored with but one faint rise. Having an abundance of time, I sat down to meditate upon "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" and to watch the surface of the stream.

Presently two trout began rising within a yard of each other. I removed the stretcher fly and taking a little box of dry flies from my pocket I knotted one of these to the casting line in its place. As I expected to resume wet-fly fishing immediately, I allowed the dropper, a pet fly of my own make, to remain where it was. Now, this fly happened to be tied on a fine wired hook, while the dry fly was busked upon an eyed hook of heavier make. As I waded cautiously into position for those trout I kept the line in the air by a series of false casts and this process dried that old dropper fly thoroughly. The consequence was that it floated more cockily and attractively than the orthodox dry fly and was more attractive to the fish. In turn they passed by the tail fly and were hooked and killed on the dropper. Then

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a larger trout rose higher up the pool and that one also came to the basket. I could make my own dry flies, but decided not to make a habit of using two of them on the same casting line.

Since that experience I have tied my flies to suit the water and the season and have enjoyed excellent sport with dry fly, but have never abjured the wet fly and never expect to do so in the streams I usually fish nowadays. The wet fly often kills best; in fact, there are days when one may make a good basket fishing wet, yet would have little or no success with the dry fly. It is well to understand both methods and practice the one which pleases Master Speckles.

In dry-fly fishing it is usually advisable to fish upstream. There are exceptions, but this is the rule. Approach cautiously and get into position below your fish; or if you see no rise, the spot where you are confident a trout is lying in wait for your fly. Do not cast straight up, with the line over the trout's back, but from one side. Try to cast at an imaginary mark two feet above the surface of the water. Check the fly gently and allow it to fall of its own weight, from six inches to two feet above and in front of the fish. As the fly floats down with the current, recover line with the left hand. This takes in the slack and allows you to keep the rod in the best position for striking. If you get no rise this surplus line is shot through the rings on the next cast. If you hook a large trout this line will be taken out, probably on his first rush, and he can then be played from the reel. If too small for this the fish may be brought within reach with the left hand by taking in line. If a trout rises when you are casting a long line it will usually be necessary to raise the right hand and arm firmly in order to drive the hook into its mouth. With a short line, a gentle strike, the far-famed turn of the wrist is all that is required. For dry-fly fishing on our large mountain streams flies dressed on hooks numbered 16, 14, 12, 10 are satisfactory. The tiniest of midges may raise trout at times, but one will miss many fish when using such small hooks. Eyed hooks firmly knotted to the fine end of the leader by the Turtle or outside figure-of-eight knot are very satisfactory, as one may use gut fine or stout.

If you find this process annoying, have your dry flies dressed on snelled hooks or take time on an off day when the light is good to tie

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short snells to your eyed flies. I confess that I find it exasperating to endeavor to tie on midges in a bad light. One great advantage which eyed flies possess is that a considerable number can be carried in a small box. Do not put wet flies in this box or allow water to drop into it. This spoils the set of the hackles for a time and also the appearance of the flies.

Begin your dry-fly fishing where the water flows steadily, but gently. Not on a rapid. A nice little ripple on the water from a light breeze will be in your favor. It is difficult to place your fly without a slight splash on absolutely still pools and even a fine leader is very conspicuous. You will be surprised to find that our trout soon become wise to the dry fly in quiet pools. Baffling currents, dragging flies and many other difficulties will confront the angler, but he will conquer them all. A touch of oil, kerosene will do, will assist flotation and save fatigue. In all fly-fishing, the wet and the dry, we are constantly learning something, and this we fancy is the secret of the infinite charm which the sport possesses. If the trout will not take your dry fly, try a wet fly, or wet the dry one. If they fail to appreciate the wet dry fly, skim or bob your dropper fly. Try every known method, but always stick to the artificial fly.

### A NOTE FROM AMERICA ON FISH LIARS, ETC.

F. G.  
MAY 1, 1909

WE HAD A wonderfully fine day to begin the trout-fishing, but the larger streams were too high to be much good. The brooks and tributaries were lined with fishermen casting the early worm and shiny minnow. In most instances the first comer, if a good hand, monopolised the sport. Trout were not very active, and I fancy that the stock of decent fish is smaller than usual. The best fish I know of was a native 16½ in. long, said to weigh 2 lb. It is true that one young angler claimed to have killed a brown trout of 4½ lb., but as he gave different weights to various persons, and as this fish grew rapidly after capture, I fear that the fellow is a first-class liar.

Your sad lack of faith in your Irish compatriots is very shocking. When a man gives the length, weight, circumference, diameter, and



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other particulars of a 52-lb. pike, and states that he caught it with a trout rod, what more can you ask? Must the pike appear personally before you and take his affidavit that he is a fish?

The ancient habit of lying about fish of all kinds is a wretched nuisance. It is not the best angler but the most successful liar who takes the largest trout. I read a story about the Esopus recently, which gave an account of wonderful sport had in that stream in April. Brown trout were killed up to 6½ lb. and the rainbows *averaged* 2½ lb. Baskets of 25 lb. capacity were filled, and long strings of trout besides. This article was very entertaining, but will lead many anglers astray, as the Esopus is easily reached from New York. It is usually high and muddy in April; the weather is cold, and while there are *some* very large brown trout, they are pretty scarce. The rainbows do not run large, and have averaged much smaller since the *fario* were introduced. They never *averaged* 2 lb.

## LITTLE TALKS ABOUT FLY-FISHING

F. S.      THE SNOW THAT fell early in May and covered  
MAY 29, 1909      the ground for three days benefited the streams and  
the country generally. As there was no frost in the  
ground the slowly melting snow and sleet was absorbed by the soil  
and should maintain a good head of water for some time to come.  
The reservoirs of the springs have been filled. When fine weather  
began, about the 8th of May, all the trout waters were bank full and  
wading the larger streams was not too easy.

Natural flies appeared in considerable numbers and the trout began to take the artificial insects in earnest. Some very good baskets of trout have been caught, but the average size was not large. The cream of the fishing will soon be skimmed, as all the free waters are heavily fished. In the early part of the season the rise of flies does not begin until mid-day or later, and may not continue more than an hour or two. During this time the best and liveliest sport of the day is usually to be had and the angler should be on a good portion of the stream he is fishing where he knows there are plenty of trout. Sometimes there are very few flies on the water, yet the trout are in the humor to

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feed during the greater part of the day. It is well to observe the water closely on our first day out and ascertain as far as possible what is likely to occur during our short stay upon the stream. As soon as warm weather begins a change may be looked for. There may be a rise of flies early in the morning and again late in the afternoon. However, the hours between 10 A.M. and 3 P.M. are frequently the best for filling the creel. The largest takes I have seen in this region have been made between 10 and 2 o'clock.

The sun is a good friend of the fly-fisher early in the season, taking the chill from the water and bringing up the natural flies. Later on his power becomes too great and we welcome the clouds which shelter us from his burning rays. An overcast sky with occasional showers may assist us considerably; in fact, after a hot and hopeless morning an army of clouds has suddenly appeared and marched across the sky, a fresh, cool breeze drifting up the stream, rippling the calm surface of the pool. In a few minutes small flies will be seen rising from the water, others sailing placidly upon the surface and the little chaps of a different species flopping and skittering about. The attention of the trout is attracted and they come strong on the feed. Rises are seen in all directions. They are very busy and soon we are busy, too. A day of perspiring disappointment and defeat has become a memorable occasion, to be marked with a white stone and never entirely forgotten. May we all have many such before embarking finally for a sail on the river Styx. I will bet that old Charon has a "put-put" ferry now.

I have some of the barbless hooks made by Seth Green or Monroe Green, his brother. Those made from needles are good for small trout, but the larger ones make a very ugly fly. So long as worms, minnows and other baits on quite large hooks are constantly used for trout it is not worth while to consider the question of removing the barbs from small fly hooks. An angler who handles the small fish he catches carefully and returns them gently to the water will kill very few undersized trout. I have seen thousands of small trout taken with hooks from brooks to stock preserves and very few died. Boys and men received a cent apiece for these little trout. This practice was stopped, I think, a good many years ago.

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### A NOTE FROM MR. THEODORE GORDON

F. G. I LOVE THIS place, [Bradley, Sullivan Co., N. Y.],  
JUNE 19, 1909 but the big freshets, ice, etc., have played the dickens  
with the stream for a considerable distance. Many  
pools have disappeared. The hatch of flies has been poor for two  
seasons, and this interferes with my sport. If there is enough fly on to  
interest the better class of trout one can have a good time, even on  
water that is very hard fished. I wish to have a few days on the Esopus,  
Willowemoc, and Beaverkill before my mother comes up on July 1.

I have taken some fine large trout, but not enough. An angler  
told me of one of those very big brown trout, and I worked very hard  
to get it. The place was well chosen. One had to wade in to the tops of  
his waterproofs, and the brush was higher than one's head on the  
bank behind. Then it was about 50 to 60 feet across to the old chap's  
stronghold. After fussing and trying various flies for an hour, the fish  
rose close to the opposite bank. Instead of going off with a rush, he  
stood on his tail, like an infernal old pike, opened his mouth, and  
wagged his head at me. The hook was none too sharp, and was prob-  
ably only stuck in the roof of his mouth. Anyhow, my card was  
returned with thanks, and I shall never see that trout again. These  
very large trout do not take much interest in flies, and it is very diffi-  
cult to get a rise out of them.

### AMERICAN NOTES

F. G. THE *FISHING GAZETTE* of May 22 arrived this  
JUNE 19, 1909 afternoon while I was making a few flies for the eve-  
ning fishing. A vacation was taken at once, and, seated  
in an ancient adamantine "rocker," we were prepared for an hour of  
solid comfort and mental recreation. What a fine hatch of artificial  
mayflies you are having! Beautiful creations they are, of all sizes and  
nearly every colour one can think of. We had quite a collection of  
patterns by sundry artists a few years ago, and at last came to the con-  
clusion that patterns were not of much use in imitating such a  
chameleon-like insect. One must know the variety that patronises

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

his water, and be prepared accordingly. What a shocking spectacle is presented by one of these works of art as it is extracted from the jaws of an old "he" trout! A dissipated-looking wreck indeed, yet it will come up smiling and ready for another bout if carefully dried and tended. I have struck a way of tying these spread-eagle wings so that they can be dried with one's fingers or rubbed with a handkerchief. This saves labour and frequent change of fly.

Mr. Marston tells us that the mayfly takes its colour from the soil, and this fact must be a great help to anglers visiting a strange river. All that is necessary is a small quantity of mud from the bottom or clay from the banks to be forwarded by post. From these the colour of the fly can be ascertained, and the artificials prepared in advance, true to nature. It is discouraging to hear of the decrease in stream flies nearly everywhere. The Neversink, in Sullivan County, has had a poor birth of flies during the last two seasons. There are a hundred naturals now where there were formerly thousands. How can one expect large trout to be interested in surface food when flies are hatching at the rate of three or four in five minutes?

Dr. James Watt, of San Francisco, would, in all probability, find the brown trout the most satisfactory fish in growth, rapid increase, and sport-giving qualities that he can introduce into his streams. But, sooner or later, prejudice will arise against any foreign fish if they appear to be increasing faster than the native species. It will be said that they have swallowed all the other fish if the latter are not as numerous as in the past. With good water and plenty of food one may have the trout he prefers if liberal in restocking. But the brown trout is such a sturdy beggar. He takes hold almost anywhere, provided that he finds sufficient food to keep him comfortable. If half-starved, he will turn cannibal, just like any other trout. Our native *fontinalis* will eat its own children on occasion, and even its ova.

Turning to the *Fishing Gazette* again, I find that illustration of dry flies interesting. They look like dandies. The set of the wings on the Sedges is mighty nice. By the way, how often do you see your Duns floating down stream with wings apart? Nine-tenths of the freshly hatched ephemeridæ sail down with wings closed, so close to-

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

gether that they appear as one wing. This may have just happened to be the case in my experience, but this is the Dun habit afloat and ashore. Their wings are closed when at rest. A split wing makes more show on the water, but at times a four-ply closed or solid wing kills better. I fancy that any fly will cock all right if it is well built upon a well-proportioned hook. We wish all flies from Midges to the largest salmon to alight upon the water in correct attitude.

The trout season opened with delightful weather on April 16, and four days of gradually increasing warmth led us to expect an early spring, with all the pleasant things that go with warm sunshiny days, refreshing showers, and rapidly developing vegetation. Instead of this, the wrath of the weather gods was aroused, and for three weeks they were extremely unkind. On May Day the ground was covered with snow and sleet, and this did not disappear for four days. All the streams were very high, and anglers had a chilling experience. There is a good side to everything disagreeable, however, and much of this moisture was absorbed by the soil. The sources of the springs and brooks were filled. The thermometer rose rapidly after May 8, and in spite of light frosts occasionally, Nature began to smile again. The "growth" of leaves, grass, and early flowers from day to day seemed indeed a fresh marvel of creation. We felt that summer was at hand. On many favoured streams the natural flies appeared in great numbers, and the trout were ready to make the best of their opportunities.

The stock of trout in the big streams is larger than we expected, and many good creels have been made. This is due in some cases to restocking, in others to the existence of preserves, usually in the upper waters. The trout increase in these, and many are brought down by heavy freshets, or work down after spawning in search of deep pools to rest and pass the winter in. In the early part of the season we take many native trout which have evidently come from the upper reaches where there is a fairly low temperature all summer. Business must be first-rate in Edinburgh (see the smile upon the engaging countenance of the Loch Leven champion of 1906.)

Speaking of business, prospects are certainly brighter over here.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

Iron and steel are good indicators, and the mills and furnaces are running full and over time. Some of your fishing-tackle people have a large trade in the United States and Canada. Others are said to be so slow in filling orders that customers become disgusted. We have many excellent shops which cater to the angling world. Competition is keen, and the best of everything is usually to be had. The increase in the demand for high-priced goods of first quality has been very great in the past five years. I asked a firm in New York to send Mr. Marston a catalogue recently. It is really an astonishing production, and shows how the nation is turning to outdoor life and outdoor sports of all kinds. Even ballooning is featured. Think of advertising balloons in a publication that appeals, in part, to the devotees of the contemplative man's recreation! (Of course, an angler could contemplate a "whole lot" from a balloon or acroplane.)

Fishermen are apt to be credulous in regard to tales of sport, but sometimes they refuse to credit a simple little story of fact. A friend of mine has gone daft on the subject of a "rocky river," down east in Maine, and will start for that particular El Dorado on Friday next. (He cannot be superstitious.) I was quite willing to give him the benefit of my own experience in North-western Maine. He swallowed all my fish stories with the greatest gusto, but when I warned him of the insect plagues of the primeval forest he became incredulous. In going into the woods we drove for miles in a valley, down which raced and pranced a magnificent trout stream. At intervals we passed above fine deep pools that made one's fingers fairly itch for the rod. We could not stop then, but registered a vow that surely that water should be tried on the way out.

On our return journey we found the wagon that carried the mail and passengers in that thinly settled region heavily loaded, and had some difficulty in finding a place for our own duffle. The owner and driver of this stage was ready to make a bargain with us for another conveyance, drawn by one horse, with the understanding that we were to follow him and stop, *en route*, for twenty-four hours, if we wished. "But," he said, "you must go to the sawmill and at once put the horse into the dark barn they have there. If you tie my horse anywhere along

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

that river the black flies will kill him, they will eat him alive." As we had suffered severely from these plagues ourselves, we were quite ready to promise to do as requested. We put up the horse in that dark barn, and in twenty minutes were casting our flies upon the bosom of the stream. Five minutes later we were simply covered with black flies. In all our experience in hot climates and in cold, never were we so tormented. Black fly dope was of little use, although we smeared it upon face, neck, and hands at intervals of a few minutes. We fought heroically, but in the end were vanquished. We were actually driven from the river, and returned to the one solitary house near the sawmill in a pitiable state. We were not surprised when the woman, who kindly gave us a lunch of such eatables as the place afforded, very gratefully accepted the trout we had killed. She said that no one would fish there while the flies were bad.

Now my friend laughs at the notion that insects of any kind can be so numerous. He refers continually to that horse, to the black flies eating him alive, to dark barns, etc. He is very scornful and perfectly absurd. I am praying that warm weather will begin early in Maine this year, and that black flies may attend him by day, midges ("minges" they are called in Maine) in the morning and evening, and mosquitoes from sunset until long after sunrise.

I have given him receipts for fly dope and an advertisement of "Muscatol," but it is probable that he will neglect them all. He quite deserves to be chewed up alive, but I fear will return before fly time. I was informed that the black flies began to disappear in July. They are fiendish creatures, resembling somewhat small house flies. They attack like bulldogs, and do not mind being killed. If the breeze dies out on a lake they will come to your canoe or boat a quarter of a mile from the shore.

All salmon fishers who have visited New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, or the tributaries of the St. Lawrence have tales to tell of these pests. Wells says of the midge that its bites make a man wish to stretch his hide on a door and go for it with a currycomb.

By the way, if you tie long pieces of gut to eyed dry flies, how will you carry them without crushing the wings and hackles? One loses

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

that great advantage which eyed hooks possess. I confess that in the smaller sizes I find it difficult to thread the eye after the light has begun to fail. Over here a good many anglers have their eyed flies dressed on short lengths of gut with a loop at the end. This is very convenient for the lazy man, but clumsy and unsightly. Two loops a few inches from the hook must enmesh a little air and be far more conspicuous in the water than a single thread of fine gut.

What a nuisance hooks are, anyway. One can never get just what he requires. I remember how Francis Francis used to complain of the hooks he bought, and, really, things are not much better now. Pennell's have deteriorated, or we seldom get the real thing. Last year I received some "genuine" Pennells made in Norway. Hall's sneaky Limerick are excellent for dry flies, but I have some hundreds of heavy, clumsy, over-barbed, over-snecked hooks of this kind that no one would care to use. Any hook will catch fish sometimes, but one wishes for a well-balanced, handsome article that will not only prove effective but make a pretty fly.

### LITTLE TALKS ABOUT FLY-FISHING

F. S.        THE SEASONS OF 1908-1909 on the lower Never-  
JULY 10, 1909        sink River have been remarkable for the comparative  
                         scarcity of natural flies. There were always fair numbers of insects on the water in May and June, during a portion of the day, in previous years; in fact, I have seen them hatching nearly all day as recently as 1906-1907. This season I have heard of good rises of flies but have seen none. There have been a lot of oddlings about at times, a few each of many different species. This is important for the man who is fond of the dry-fly style of trout fishing, as he finds very few large fish that are intent upon surface food. He may mark down a few rising trout, but after fishing in his best style for half an hour, and changing the pattern of his fly several times, he is rewarded for his pains with nothing better than nine-inch fish. Under these conditions should be particularly smart and careful in matters of detail.

There are few investments that pay poorer dividends than econ-



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

omy in the matter of gut or flies, and carelessness will be punished swiftly. I had several leaders of fine gut that had been used only once or twice last season, and the first day I went fishing this year, I mounted one of these relics, which certainly looked all right. After taking and returning several eight-inchers, I noted two undoubtedly good fish close to the opposite bank. Beginning with the lowest of these, the second cast was rewarded by a lively rise, that hurdle-race style of rise, when the trout shows his head and shoulders as he comes up and goes down with the fly in his mouth; I struck, and the fish kept that fly. "Well," "Mount another," "Must have hit him too hard," "Let us try the other fellow"; I did so with the same result, exactly. The leader was strong enough dry, but after soaking was as weak as fine cotton thread. Testing dry gut is of no avail, I have had hanks of beautiful gut, long, round and not particularly fine, that could scarcely be broken by a hard pull, yet were weak as pack-thread when wet.

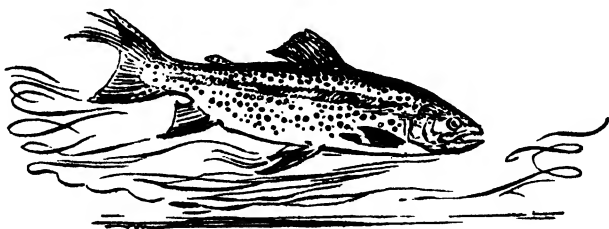
Sport was good everywhere while the water was high, but deteriorated rapidly when we had dry weather and high winds. The Never-sink was hard fished, and when one considers the large number of trout killed on bait and fly during a few weeks in the month of May, it is not surprising that the fishing is disappointing, particularly on the more accessible portions of the river. Last Saturday afternoon there were thirty men on about two miles and a half of the stream. I met ten of them, and hearing that twenty more were coming down upon me, confined my attentions to one long pool, until they began to appear at the top. Then discretion seemed better than valor, and I fled, through soaking wet bushes, homeward. First, however, I relieved my basket of its load of two fish, which I presented to the advance guard, as he had none; also, two flies, with which he caught one trout.

To be in the real country, on a farm, is enough happiness at this season of the year for a reasonable human being. An hour or two of good sport is just a filling of the cup to overflowing. The recollections of these fortunate days should be placed on file for future reference, say when the wind blows cold in winter nights and the day has been short and dismal.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

Anglers are optimistic, as a class, and usually forget the days when the fates are unkind and disappointment attends them. Occasionally they tell a good hard-luck story, but usually only their victories are chronicled. Why do we work so hard when all conditions are antagonistic, and take it easy when sport is good? We fight the wind when it is difficult to keep a fly on the water, defy the weather when it is detestable and go on fishing when the water is dead low and not a trout is on the rise. We fish for many more hours than on a fortuitous occasion, and limp homeward at close of day almost too weary to eat a late supper when we do get it. Those confounded trout must be compelled to eat flies—and artificial ones, at that—whether they wish to feed or not. The water must be thrashed until it yields up its treasures; and sure enough they do come forth at the rate of about one per hour. I confess I could enjoy a little return to the Waltonian style of angling, the strolling along in dewy meads, “by shallow rivers, to whose falls melodious birds sing madrigals,” occasionally extracting a two-pounder, loafing under umbrageous trees and reading “Rhymes of the Stream and Forest,” by Frank Merton Buckland, in which one will find poems to fit the angler’s mood. After lunch, a pretty milkmaid, with song, might be introduced, with advantage, while we burn tobacco and recline in dreamy ease.

I know a few streams where one can have easy fishing, but the Esopus and Neversink are not in that class. Englishmen who pay one hundred guineas for a rod in a well stocked preserve, with footpaths and planks over the wet places and ditches, must enjoy the real thing. Think of a 12-inch limit and no bait-fishing allowed! Paradise! But even in merry England, winds are adverse and have to be fought with heavy rods and weighty lines. There is always a fly in the ointment, as well as the end of the line. We yearn for a soft snap.



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

### LITTLE TALKS ABOUT FLY FISHING

F. S. ALL THE QUIET' water on the Neversink was formerly alive with the large caddis larva, which builds its house of dead twigs—the "stick bait" of the Western North Carolina mountains. The stones in the running water were covered with the little cases made of sand and tiny pebbles, and the larger rocks, that were exposed to the air, displayed the discarded shells of the big stone fly and many smaller species. A considerable number of larvæ can still be found by turning over the stones in shallow water, but the supply is much smaller than it was a few years ago. The hatch of the ephemeridæ is much smaller. When we do see a good rise of fly, it is soon over, rarely continuing more than an hour at the best of times. This rise occurs only when the temperature of the air and water is just right, and at present it does not begin until the sun is off the water. Long hours pass during the day when scarcely a fly or rising trout is to be seen anywhere on the river. Very possibly, conditions may be better on the upper reaches, which did not suffer so much from the ice and flood in February, 1908. Also, the water has a lower temperature up there. It has not traveled so many miles over shallow ripples under the burning rays of a June sun.

Much rain fell one night, and next evening I found the river very full. A first-rate rise of fly began about 6:30 P. M., and the trout came strong on the feed. This rendered it easy to form an opinion as to the stock of trout in the stream, as all the little chaps were busy. Here and there a large trout, stimulated by the prospect of a dainty supper, with all the delicacies of the season in sight, may be seen at work. These fish feed very quietly, as a rule, and their first strong rush when hooked comes as a glad surprise to the angler who quite imagines that he is casting to a small trout.

One evening a trout rose steadily, above a flat rock under water, at the tail of a long glide, half stream, half pool. I tried him with a small Wickham, which had been much in favor with the fish for several evenings, but he ignored my attractions and I moved on up the run. After killing a native trout on the Wickham and being refused by several rising fish, I tied on a pet quill-bodied fly of my own invention

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

on No. 1 hook. As this brought me two fish, I returned to try conclusions with my friend near the rock. He was still at tea, and the new fly was accepted without hesitation. It is mighty pleasant when the reel screams as the rod doubles up, and one feels that there is something weighty at the end of the line. This trout was hooked by the "skin of his teeth," a mere bit of flesh. It was nearly a case of "gone forever, though to memory dear."

How those little hooks do cling once they find a lodgment. It is no joke to extract one from a finger if they penetrate over that tiny barb. Give me the small, neat barb and sharp point, not those great, long things that are now so common. The latter do not enter easily and only tear the flesh, making a slit or gash, from which the hook escapes if any slack line is allowed. In fact, they sometimes come away with a bit of flesh attached. I have samples of hooks with two barbs, one behind the other, and have seen others with barbs on both sides, all entirely unnecessary.

The swallows have been hard at work building their mud homes under the caves of the barn. The catbird, bobolink and other tuneful songsters, have not been silent. I saw a yellow shanks tatlcr on the 5th of June, a very rare bird hercabouts; also a solitary snipe. The latter is usually the first of the southward bound migrants that we see in August. The ospreys were all killed off, I fear, some years ago. They are beautiful birds, and it was interesting to watch them at their fishing. They caught large suckers upon the ripples. I never saw one with a trout in its talons. I see a few kingfishers; not as many as usual. I am tempted to borrow a 20-gauge and endeavor to exterminate the English sparrows—their everlasting chirp is a discordant note in the chorus of sweet bird tones. Then they are such bullying little wretches, always fighting among themselves, or going for some small and timid bird.

June is fine, rain or shine. Why can't we have more June and less January? The pleasant seasons seem to be in a hurry up here, and we have hardly any real spring.

I remember no season when the trout rose so well in wet weather.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Some of the best baskets have been made when there was heavy rain all day. On the Beaverkill for a few days the trout rose well during the heaviest of the downpour. I have heard many stories of big catches being made while rain descended in torrents, but have always had poor sport during such weather, except on two occasions. I can not say that I enjoy a thorough soaking on a chilly day; everything wet and nasty, and the water from the rod running up my arm. Would prefer to stay at home and tie flies; but if a man's time is limited, he must fish, no matter how bad the conditions may be. By the way, I saw the worst basket that has come under my notice, last Friday. Not a trout of respectable size in it. The fish were killed on minnows, and it certainly was a poor day for fly-fishing. What splendid sport we would have if fly only were used. It will not always kill.

### RUFFED GROUSE FEATHERS

F. G.  
JANUARY 15,  
1910

[*From the editorial columns of R. B. M.—Ed.*]  
[“I ENCLOSE the tail of a hen ruffed grouse I shot for comparison with that of the cock I mailed you a week or more ago. You will note that it is more in the red-brown, while the general effect of the cock's tail is grey-brown. Splendid winter weather here, three degrees above zero this morning at breakfast time. Lots of snow in the country, but it is badly drifted—some roads in such conditions that sleighs have to take a round-about course through the fields. Will begin to take an interest in the tying of flies next month. Received a photograph of a pretty basket of trout yesterday, weight, 20 lb.: largest fish, 20½ in. long, weight 3 lb. Wishing you a Happy New Year.—Cordially yours,

THEODORE GORDON”

[Much obliged to Mr. Gordon for the tails; the feathers are handsomely barred—reddish brown, black, and light grey—and will make very effective Sedge and Alder wings. I hope to make and use some flies from them this spring, when we get some light in London. Nearly all my writing and reading is done by electric light in our winter months, and it is not good for one's eyes, I am sure.—R. B. M.]

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

### MR. THEODORE GORDON AND HIS DOG

[I asked Mr. Gordon some time ago if he could let me have his portrait, as I was sure many readers of the *Fishing Gazette* who have enjoyed his notes would be glad to see it. He replied as follows:

“DEAR MR. MARSTON,—In acknowledging receipt of views, mailed to you last winter, you asked for a photograph of myself. I was not able to find one at that time, and forgot the thing entirely until recently, when I had a copy made for a friend. This includes one of the finest dogs and truest friends I have ever had. I have raised many dogs and bought others after they were broken, and have shot over great numbers owned by other men, but never saw another like ‘Shot.’ He possessed many of the characteristics of the highest type of man: courage, devotion, good breeding, and perfect manners. He was an excellent field dog, good on all game—woodcock, snipe, partridge or quail—a good ranger, and absolutely staunch. No man or animal could enter room or camp when I was asleep. He feared no odds in my defence, and narrowly escaped being killed several times.—T. G.”]

### A LITTLE TALK ABOUT FLY-FISHING

F. S.  
MARCH 19,  
1910

I THINK THAT I wrote to *Forest and Stream* last spring about the deer that appeared in the sunny slope of a mountain near Claryville, in Sullivan County, N. Y. Recently ten deer were observed in the same place and scarcely a day passes that two or more cannot be seen from the village street.

The snow melts early on this spot and the deer enjoy the warmth, often lying down and chewing the cud, I presume, although food must be far from abundant. There is much snow in the woods, although the sleighing is nearly ruined. Winter broke up Feb. 26, and for nearly a week we had rain or mist and melting snow. The streams became rushing torrents, the water draining rapidly from the frozen ground. It seems a great waste of moisture when one remembers the prolonged drouths of the last two years. Many farmers were compelled to draw water from a distance for their stock as late as Decem-

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

ber of last year, and this was true of localities that had never suffered in the same way before.

I hope that the trout have come through the hard winter in fair condition. The January thaw with accompanying freshets, ice jams and the sudden breaking up of the heavy ice must have been very trying to their nerves, if nothing worse. The last thaw has been more gradual, it seems to me, and I trust that no serious damage has been done either to the streams or the fish. Present indications seem to point to an early spring, but no one would be much surprised by the return of real wintry weather. Thousands of anglers are thinking of this region just now, as it is easy of access. The number of men who visit Ulster and Sullivan counties in the spring is surprisingly large. Such streams as the Beaverkill and Neversink are lined with fishermen during the few weeks that are supposed to cover the best of the sport. For the man who has but two or three days at his disposal, to work off that feverish longing for bright waters and open country, this is rather uncertain. The weather is so variable and the streams are often too high for good fishing. Not much good can be done while the snow water is running. On the flats where there are quiet pools or still waters, the trout sometimes collect in great numbers. As the snow brew seems to run outside, the difference in color may be seen at once. A few good trout may be picked out in such places when nothing can be done in the fast water.

When conditions are really favorable and one finds great numbers of anglers on the stream, it rarely pays to hurry and endeavor to find good water that has not been fished; to go further is usually to fare worse and to meet more people with rods. One will probably do as well and have a better time going slow and taking it easy. A rise of natural flies is a great encouragement, as one sees for himself that there are trout where he is if he can catch them. Of course several minnow fishers may come along and put all the fish down, but it is useless to feel irritable about it. On free water there are always bait-fishers except on such rivers as Au Sable in Michigan, where fly only has been the law for two or three years. I hear there are lots of fish now.

I remember my first essay at April fishing with the artificial fly

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

when I was a small boy. An angler of experience had given me a Patton fly, brown body and guinea fowl wings, and I constructed a fly-rod out of the remnants of several fine old broken rods. The trout were usually up to snuff, as they were much pestered in those parts, but there seemed to be a fascination about that fly, and twenty-two of them found their way into the basket. A very proud boy marched home that night, but the conceit was soon to be taken out of him. On his next half holiday he found a quiet pool where the trout were busily feeding. He removed the bait hook from his leader and attached that irresistible Patton fly. Cast followed cast in rapid succession; many times the young fisherman fancied that the trout tried to grab the fly, but he could not hook one. At last, completely worn out and with an aching arm, he gave it up for that day and retired from the scene with chastened spirit. When putting up his tackle after reaching home the mystery was explained. He had been fly-fishing with two large shot on the leader.

In those days I was under the tutorage of an ancient fisherman who was known as "Docky," and had a great respect for his piscatorial precepts. Now Docky meant business; he wanted fish, and as many of them as possible without regard to methods. His large pocket book held a great quantity of artificial flies, but they were carried in a tangled mass. There was always an abundance of the best bait hooks in all the useful sizes and he pinned his faith to a long and powerful fly-rod in four points. With this two-handed weapon he could heave out many yards of his old-fashioned silk and hair line when necessity required, but for the most part he used bait. Docky believed in oils and unguents, and often strange odors "from Araby the blest," or some seaport nearer at hand, were wafted from his person. Among his stores was always to be found a huge lump of asafetida, and small pieces of this were mingled with his worms. The said worms were carried in the foot of an old stocking or sock and this was deposited in the most convenient pocket of his fishing coat.

I accepted a portion of sock and fragrant wriggling contents with joy. Surely, no trout could ignore a temptation so strong, and success was assured. The good people at home always knew when I had been fishing with Docky, but were at a loss as to the reason why I smelled



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

so horribly. The discovery of the worm bag with its piece of asafetida in my jacket pocket was sufficiently explanatory, but "why would boys do such things" remained a mystery.

Fortunately a copy of Norris' "American Angler's Book" came into my possession, and this was all for fly-fishing where trout were the quarry in view. Uncle Thad's easily comprehended instructions enabled me to tie flies for myself. At first they were put together without much regard for strength. In one afternoon five flies were torn from the hooks, although the best part of the morning hours had been lost in their construction. However, they killed thirteen trout before they perished.

Did you ever have much success in fly-fishing by moonlight? This question has puzzled me considerably, as of recent years I have failed to score when the night was, as the saying is, as bright as day. Yet I remember an evening, after a long hot day of disappointment, when the trout rose well for an hour and a half after the moon appeared above the horizon. I took twenty-one native trout weighing six and a half pounds. They were all about the same size and by no means large fish, yet this is a good basket for an overfished stream in the United States. Two years ago, one perfect summer night, I was tempted to try moonlit fishing again, but did not have a rise from a trout, while the chub or fall fish were a nuisance. One is not much annoyed by chub early in the season, but on warm days in summer they are sometimes very troublesome. I took one of nineteen inches on a large fly just below Roscoe, and a well known resident angler informed me that when ice began to form along the lower Beaverkill very large chub could be caught. Norris states that they were formerly taken in the Schuylkill River up to twenty-two inches and weighing three pounds. In youth I was fond of chub fishing in large rocky streams, and white grub worms, fresh water mussels and large grasshoppers were the killing baits for fish of one to two pounds.

The man who has fishing bred in the bone will cast his line in anything that looks like water and find pleasure in catching almost anything that has scales and fins. He may be by nature destitute of the virtue of patience, yet he will persevere for hours or days in attempting to inveigle a few small or almost worthless fish. This innate love

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

of sport is one of the best gifts of a kind Providence and will do more to create and maintain a cheerful spirit than any other recreation in the world.

There are many sorts of fishing just as there are many kinds of fish, but especially am I thankful that the brook trout is fond of insects, that these insects and their larvæ are abundant in most trout streams, and that they are—with the exception of a very few—too delicate and fragile to be used upon the hook as bait. For from these things sprang the art of fly-fishing hundreds of years ago. Our ancestors saw the fish rising and feeding upon the natural flies; doubtless they also noted the trout jumping at little floating feathers and other trifles when in a playful mood. This led to invention and the creation of roughly made artificials with a few duck feathers, cock hackles and dubbings. The earliest known fly is said to have been a red cock hackle, but they soon learned that the feathers of many game birds held colors and mottlings in common with the small insects born of the water. They looked upon feathers, furs, silks and wools with new eyes, striving always to improve in the art of imitation, for there is no doubt that the ancient angler imitated nature. There were not so many theories and theorists as in the present age; the differing schools of fly-fishers have mostly arisen during the last sixty years.

Of course, as one grows older, he becomes a trifle set in his ways. He wishes to have his fishing served in a particular style. If wedded to the artificial fly, he may prefer to fish from a boat or canoe in large water. Another takes to stream fishing; in fact, I have known men who most enjoyed following the smallest brooks among the mountains. One angler is a dry-fly enthusiast, while his chum sticks to the wet fly. We become so fond of fly-fishing that we try it on everything, and as a matter of fact nearly all game fish may be taken on some kind of fly at one time or another. I have had quite a varied experience, east and west, north and south, and am inclined to the belief that the best sport is not found where trout, for instance, are most abundant and easiest to catch. A fine big stream that is hard fished, yet holds good trout and is rich in insect life, offers great possibilities for interesting fly-fishing.

How it puts a man on his mettle when he sees the fish rising all

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

over the place, but ignoring entirely the flies he offers. They are feeding and feeding well; you are sure that you can take them if you had the right fly. I have seen a number of anglers spend a couple of hours at one pool. They could not tear themselves away although after a time they realized that all their stock flies were too large and mostly too bright to counterfeit the tiny dun that was on the water. It was great fun as well as exasperating, and a day or two later we got a fly that would kill under the same conditions. Sometimes the fish will take a variety of artificials when rising at naturals; again they seem to be taking one fly only.

I have fancied that the color of a particular insect might be impressed or photographed in the eye until trout became almost blind or indifferent to any other color. We can theorize and puzzle to our heart's content, but we will never know it all. A man loses a good deal when he gets out of his difficulties by changing to bait. He will never know the half of what the artificial fly is capable of doing.

### A LITTLE TALK ABOUT FLY-FISHING

F. S.  
JUNE 11, 1910      ALTHOUGH A FEW trout were caught with bait, and some of them of very good size, fly-fishing did not begin in the Catskills and Sullivan County until after May 1. The weather has been for the most part cold and windy, but even on the coldest days there was usually an hour or two when the trout rose with some freedom on the Beaverkill and Willowemoc. On the Neversink, the fly-fishing was good occasionally, but a large proportion of the fish taken are said to have fallen victims to bait.

Since the breaking up of the heavy ice and freshet in February, 1908, natural insects have been much less numerous upon the Neversink than in previous years. Probably millions of larvæ were carried away and the floods this present year have not helped the situation. With a sparse hatch of natural flies, or none at all, the trout pay less attention to surface food and are not apt to be tempted by the artificial insect—that creation of feathers, fur, silk and dubbing. However, I am glad to say that there were days when good baskets were made by the fly-fisher pure and simple.

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To the angler who has acquired a fondness for dry-fly fishing, the scarcity of the insects born of the water is a real misfortune. He may pass hours by the stream and never spot a rising trout of respectable size. If he sees fish midging in the quiet water near the pool's foot, they are probably fingerling *fontinalis*, native trout too small for the creel.

By the way, if you wish to learn how quickly even these baby trout may be educated, for the day at least, try these small fish from below with the tiniest of midge flies and finest gut, and note how quickly they get on to your deceptive allurements. As for the large trout feeding in quiet, slow flowing water, they are extremely diffident and require the most delicate and accurate casting, with finest gut near the fly. Of course, they are shy and easily scared, or put down. Stand well behind and a little to the right or left of an angler fishing such water. If the light is good one can not fail to note the little splash usually made by the artificial fly and hook, also the long fine welt upon the surface created by the falling line. The heavier the line and leader, and the larger the fly, the more difficult it is to avoid a splash.

In the old days, when pliant twelve-foot rods and fine braided silk, or silk and hair lines were used, all the movements of the angler were comparatively slow and gentle, and it seemed to be easier for the expert to place his fly softly. The modern rod is shorter and has far more backbone. Longer casts can be made and the movements of the rod are sharp and quick. The line must have weight to bring out the action of the rod, although for ordinary stream fishing quite a fine well-dressed line will answer. The tapering of the last ten to fifteen yards is certainly an advantage, and the gut casting line should continue this tapering to the fly. The last two or three lengths of gut next the fly should be as fine as we can use successfully, without leaving too many flies in the fishes' mouths on the strike. Even the finest of gut will endure a steady pull from a big trout. It is the sudden jerks that are dangerous. Where there are many obstructions, finest drawn gut torments the angler, as he cannot butt his large fish quickly and surely. Big brown trout often have a hole or home and rush toward it at once on being hooked.

I saw a beautiful trout yesterday that was killed on worm bait

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below the falls of the Neversink at old Fallsburg. This fish was twenty-one inches long and was said to weigh four pounds. This would indicate that its condition was good for a stream trout. One is usually disappointed in the weight for length when he puts his big fish on the scales. I hear that a seven-and-a-half-pound trout was speared on the Beaverkill last week. Every man's hand is against the few "busters" whose presence in the river creates many of the dreams and hopes that add so much to the joy of angling.

There are always more or less of the small yellowish caddis flies on the water in May and June, but the trout do not appear to be very fond of them. Should there be a good hatch of ephemeridæ, the sub-imago appearing upon the surface of the stream, no matter how small the insects may be, if they are sufficiently numerous, the trout soon become interested and rise freely. Occasionally they will take almost any small fly that is suitable for the water, but again they are strong on one insect and will not notice anything else. A man may fling the contents of his fly-book or box over the feeding trout, yet take none of them. This is harrowing to the soul and has a tendency to mar that tranquillity of mind and peaceful self-possession which are supposed to be attributes of all good anglers. This is the time when the true believer in the exact imitation of the natural insect has a chance to score. He usually carries a few gross of flies upon his person and can find among them something that is akin in color and size to the insect on the water. Presenting this for favorable consideration, he may have great sport as long as the rise continues, but it behooves him to be smart, not to waste these precious minutes. When the rise is over the trout go down, and as far as my experience goes, are hard to move, the stream seems lifeless, and one would imagine that it holds but a few trout. There are not many things that tickle the fisherman more than hitting off the taking fly, when the fish are difficult and hard to please.

All things considered, the trout fishing has held out well in the Catskills and Sullivan County, but the field of action is narrowing year by year, while the fishermen appear in constantly increasing numbers. The best portions of the Beaverkill are now controlled by clubs, the west branch of the Neversink has long been in private hands; but to

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

my eyes the most discouraging feature in the situation is the changes that have come through the action of floods and ice. There is not as much good holding water as in years gone by. Many of the large pools have shrunk or filled up. There are not many places now where a big trout can feel safe and at his ease unless the water is high. The changes in the bed of these rivers from year to year are very considerable. An old angler on visiting one of them after an absence of five years would feel almost a stranger and realize that he must study the water as if it was an unknown stream.

### GORDON'S FANCY

F. S. [IN AN AUTUMN issue of *Forest and Stream*, I  
FEBRUARY 11, saw an interesting article written by one whose where-  
1911 abouts had become unknown, but who is near and  
dear to me, for I have spent many happy hours in his  
company on that famous and productive trout stream, the Beaverkill.  
Its author is that clever fly-tying artist, sportsman and gentleman,  
Theodore Gordon.

I first made Mr. Gordon's acquaintance in 1906, when on a fishing trip on the Beaverkill River. The stream has its source in Slide mountain, a part of the Catskills, and from its beginning to the point where it joins the Willowemoc River at the little village of Roscoe, about 130 miles from New York City, it is a series of pools for over thirty miles. The banks are heavily timbered and beneath them the brook trout find delightful retreats. It is a fisherman's paradise and visited annually by a number of men who think for nine months of the pleasures of a day on its silver waters.

Two species of trout inhabit the stream, the old pioneer brook trout and the brown. Unlike the native brook trout, the brown trout are particularly aggressive in the early spring, and grow rapidly, often reaching the six pound mark. They are cannibals, and when one of their number becomes permanently located in a large pool nothing in the way of small fish or food is allowed to escape its rapacious jaws.

When I met Mr. Gordon I was sitting beside a large pool on this stream, where the water had a peculiar swirling motion under an

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overhanging tree. I succeeded in raising an exceptionally large fish, which came to the surface in a sluggish manner, giving a view of his broad back and side to the extent of fifteen or sixteen inches. My fly was the Rube Wood. Swift water and the length of my cast were against the trout getting a firm hold and I was unable to hook him securely. Having fished for the large ones repeatedly, I realized that the golden opportunity for the day was past. The chances were a hundred to one that he would not rise again that day and with these unpleasant truths in mind, I sat down to collect my nerves, inspect my tackle and study the possibilities of getting nearer the old monarch, ere I again dropped the cast over his home. A voice attracted my attention and upon looking up I saw a stranger, whose cheery greeting of "What luck?" led to a conversation. The stranger proved none other than Mr. Gordon and this pool was one of his favorites.

A glance at his tackle told me that he was a real fisherman, and I exposed my secret of the big trout that I had succeeded in raising in the pool beside us. Mr. Gordon insisted that I try again, which I did, but as expected without success. We then began to scheme to entice the old fellow again to feed. It was then that I discovered Mr. Gordon's tact and ability. He matched and exactly duplicated in shade and color a fly like those that were swarming about the stream. Along the banks grew some willows, and in these Mr. Gordon found several fine specimens of the fly. After securing a large one, Mr. Gordon produced a box of feathers, gut and No. 12 fly hooks. In a remarkably short time he had tied a beautiful duplicate of the original and handing it to me insisted on another effort at the old trout.

We decided to go up stream, cross the rapids and address the pool from an entirely different point, an achievement which has produced results for me many times since. Whipping my fly and leader dry, and measuring the length of cast on another part of the pool, I was ready to make the supreme effort, especially anxious for results, after the amount of interest my friend had taken in the matter. Waiting for a slight breeze to abate, I carefully dropped our latest tempting lure close up to the bank and directly over the home of the fish. There followed a rush, splash, a strike altogether different from that of an hour or so before, and he had it.

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The fish was larger than I expected, and despite all efforts to force him out of the pool against the rapids, he successfully evaded me and pulled like a young dog to get underneath the overhanging bank. My rod weighed but  $4\frac{1}{2}$  ounces and with every succeeding rush for the bank came the reminder of a light leader and a No. 12 hook. Finally, I called over to Mr. Gordon: "I'm going in there, wet or not wet," and in I went over the waders and all. It was May 22, and the mountain water was cold as ice, but this movement was more than the old monarch could stand. With a rush he started down stream, and for fully one-eighth of a mile we tumbled over rocks and boulders. I won, and when Gordon came up to me on the bank, the rule said  $20\frac{1}{4}$  inches and the scales three pounds, eight ounces. I dubbed the fly "Gordon's Fancy," and this fly is known to-day by nearly every fly-fisherman in the country.

That evening we ate supper together at the Trout Valley Farm, at Beaverkill, N. Y., and the next day found us fishing in a lake inhabited by brown trout, which had the reputation of not yielding easily to the lures of fishermen. We mastered the reason why and successfully fished it, landing a number that varied in length from 19 to 24 inches. We used another fly of Mr. Gordon's called Bumble Puppy, without exception the greatest lure for lake trout ever used after they have reached the  $2\frac{1}{2}$  pound mark.

M. T. DAVIDSON.]

## A NOTE FROM MR. THEODORE GORDON

F. G. [I WAS GLAD to get the following note from our  
JULY 15, 1911 old American correspondent, Mr. Theodore Gordon,  
who always has something interesting to say. The "excellent fly" he sends would kill well anywhere. It is dressed in the wet-fly style, with wing of summer duck, and whisks of same, with apple-green mohair body hackled pretty closely all down with a pale grey hackle—in fact, when held up to the light the hackle is colourless, like fine spun glass . . .—R. B. M.]

This is an excellent fly for large waters or in the evening, but it is difficult to get hackles suitable for it. In this country, in the month of



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May, conditions were not favourable. The weather was intensely hot, the streams low, and reports went out that the season was a poor one. However, with heavy rains and cool weather in June, the situation changed. Plenty of trout appeared—probably running up from the heavy waters below—and many anglers were busy. Now the water is rather low again, and for the past week the hatch of natural flies has been very light. At the best hour yesterday evening nothing was hatching except “curses” and a small greenish caddis fly, and I took only four fish.

There is too much night-fishing in the large pools. It makes the trout of good size very shy. In fact, in a low water they do not come out to feed until it is nearly dark. Fly-fishing with large flies on a warm summer night is pleasant enough, and gives one an opportunity of getting on terms with those “celebrated” cannibal trout that there is so much talk about in England and America.

Big trout always did and always will eat little ones if they are hungry and the small beggars are at hand. I have seen twenty-five trout of all sizes dwell together in comfort and apparent amity as long as they were well supplied with food. Then for weeks they were neglected. Some were caught to be cooked, but as they became ravenous the smaller trout disappeared, until only three fish of from  $2\frac{1}{2}$  lb. to  $4\frac{1}{4}$  lb. remained in the great tank. At last the two largest killed the  $2\frac{1}{2}$ -pounder, and the big fellow attacked the one next in size, which was removed to a spring. The lonely occupant of the tank would now take dead minnows as fast as they were thrown in, but my only means of obtaining these was with small fly or bait when trout-fishing.

The common white-tail or Virginia deer has become quite plentiful in this section, and is something of a nuisance to the owners of vegetable gardens. Farmers say that their depredations are really serious, one man losing all his young beans and another thousands of infant cabbages.

There is a short open season of fifteen days in November, but the brush is very thick, and no driving with dogs is allowed by the law.

Last season the leaves were very dry, and it was impossible to travel through the woods without alarming the deer. Still, hunting was practically out of the question.”

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### LITTLE TALKS ABOUT FLY-FISHING

F. S. "OH, WHY SHOULD the spirit of mortal be proud?"  
JULY 8, 1911 Why do we persist in making the same old mistakes, when we really do know better? For instance, take fine gut leaders or casting lines that have been used a little and then put away for a year or two.

They seem to be quite good and are strong enough when dry. It is a bother to soak well and test before using, so on they go and away they go.

Not being fit or of much account physically at the present writing, my peregrinations have been strictly limited in extent. It will be understood, therefore, that I was highly gratified by the discovery of a short stretch of water that was entirely to my mind and suited to a slow, not to say, poky method of fishing. I took one good trout, hooked another, which proved to be one of those lazy beggars that stand on their tails and gape at you, or slowly sail about, no dash, no go at all. Of course, this fish got away; they usually do.

By this time the leader was thoroughly soaked and I had arrived at the cream of the water. The first cast placed the fly just right after I had spotted a quiet rise at a natural, and a large trout accepted the artificial insect with equal confidence. A gentle strike and away sailed the fish with the fly and four feet of gut as mementoes of a silly looking angler. Never mind, I had another choice two-year-old casting line on my hat, fly tied on and all the rest of it. Do it again? I did; two times, twice more. Two pet flies presented to the trout for nose rings, purely decorative purposes. At last I awoke and gently destroyed those used leaders, throwing the short remnants into the stream. The trout can play with these short pieces or use them instead of worms.

The day was not done, darkness had not fallen; in fact, the sun was still shining with great industry and ability, but a kindly mountain bobbed up and interposed its bulk between that too ardent luminary and a long still flat through which the water was just moving. Here and there trout were rising at some exceedingly minute insects and I carefully marked these down. I had put up a brand new casting line after thoroughly soaking in the wet box—it had been there all the

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time—and in something less than an hour I had extracted five very handsome trout.

The sport was over and suddenly five large broken blisters on two feet began to shout. The waders and heavy brogans weighed several hundred pounds. I found that I was fatigued, weary or tired, that it was about supper time and that it was necessary to walk home.

Why should it be necessary to walk home? Nobody else does that. They all have automobiles. Many a time I have longed to lie down by the trail and die peacefully rather than walk another mile. An old friend and myself once held each other up for an hour or more after we arrived at something like a road. We adopted the form of an inverted letter A. Shoulder to shoulder we wobbled gracefully on. To be sure he produced a tiny vinaigrette, a miserable caricature of a thing, supposed to be a flask, and said to contain ardent spirits, but it held something less than a sixteenth of a drink. However, we reached home, which was the object we had in mind, and by the second day after were quite ready to do it again. 'Tight lines on big trout or what you will.

### LITTLE TALKS ABOUT FLY-FISHING

F. S. MAY IS USUALLY considered the fly-fishing month  
JULY 22, 1911 par excellence, but this year the seasons were somewhat astray. The weather was hot and dry, and the streams shrank until they were flowing at midsummer levels. We did hear of occasional good sport, but it was not until June changed to April weather that everyone had a chance at the fish. Rain and cool winds came together, and all the rods were out. A great many trout were killed, and while it is true that the streams were for a time too much discolored for the artificial fly, yet the bait-fisherman made the most of his opportunities. Now we wish for more rain. The waters have been falling, falling, and high winds have dried the surface of the earth.

On a number of streams this season the variety of water-born insects or number of species hatching at the same time was remarkable. Late in the afternoon a storm of flies began to rise, and multitudes were in the air, for the most part flying upstream. At this time

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one realized that the trout were really very numerous, as they were rising everywhere from the bottom of a pool to the broken water at the top. Until this great show of fly it had been thought that the stock of trout was small, owing to prolonged drouths and poor conditions during two years.

Upon all the streams in the mountains the effects of deforestation and drainage may be seen. With many great floods or freshets during the past ten years the tendency has been to destroy the natural banks or bounds of these waters. In many parts pools have been eliminated, and there are long stretches of rapid shallow water flowing between wide margins of stones of all sizes. High water being followed by prolonged drouths during the summer and fall months, streams of good size degenerate into mere brooks and the fish are much exposed. Large fish rarely contain trout. At long intervals one is found in the stomach of a freshly captured specimen, and the fact is heralded far and wide. One would be led to believe that the diet of big trout consisted largely of little ones, but they have other fish to fry, an abundance of food without venturing in pursuit of their small brothers and sisters.

The large brown trout used to feed upon the large caddis or so-called "stick bait" which was formerly extremely plentiful. The floods and frequent changes in these rivers appear to have removed much of this food. At one time all the large pools and still waters were paved with it, and the large grub must be very nutritious. The trout gulped them down, woody case and all. The cases or remains of the same would be found in their stomachs.

There are yet quantities of the small case worms or caddis which build their homes of small gravel and grains of sand, and are of many sizes and colors. The stick bait hatched out at night into flies of the sort known in England as sedges, large brown insects in shades of color from light to dark. Some had varied or slightly mottled wings.

One of the best anglers of my acquaintance said to me recently: "I have fished for trout more than forty years. Twenty years ago I thought that I knew all that could be learned in regard to these fish. I understood their habits and the use of artificial flies at all times and seasons. Now I make no such claims. I do not know a great deal about trout and never expect to."

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It is the man of limited experience who knows it all. The old hand is alive to the fact that he is always learning something new and interesting. Fly-fishing would never have been a passion with some of our greatest and best men if all its intricacies could be mastered in a few weeks.

The great blessing of fly-fishing probably comes in old age. Men of affairs who have led a busy life find their greatest consolations and renewed health and strength in pursuit of trout or salmon. Any kind of fishing is good, but fly-fishing is best of all.

We are constantly meeting in print or person, with the angler of one, two, three or four flies, which they claim are all that are necessary for the taking of trout at any time and anywhere. They have good success upon the waters with which they are familiar, and the practice saves time, observation and possibly thinking. It is so largely a matter of locality, the water and the season, also of the feeding habits of the trout, that controversy is idle. To have a large stock of flies of all sorts and colors does not mean changing for the sake of changing, putting up fresh flies because one is not catching trout, but it does mean the ability to change—when it is worth while, when it so happens, for instance, that the fish are feeding upon a particular insect which is hatching freely. For the time being they seem to have eyes for that fly and neglect others. These times are not so rare as some people think. They are not uncommon in New York and Pennsylvania, and I have seen them in Maine lakes when the weather began to get warm and there was not much breeze. Again and again, early in the season as well as late, fishermen will tell you that they did well before the rise of fly came on. Then, although the trout were rising freely, they could do little or nothing. There is no rule; at times they will take anything in the way of a standard pattern, but when you do have the right fly when you need it, you will have great sport for an hour or two with the better class of fish, and what is more, having succeeded when failure seemed imminent you feel quite proud of yourself. The occasion will be marked down in memory as a red-letter day.

It seems to me that when the flies appear natural or deceptive to us, and the gut line fine and almost invisible, these things look natu-

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

ral and deceptive to the trout and that our success is often a matter of the light, position of the sun, clouds, wind, etc. At times the flies, even the best of them, are but poor counterfeits of the real thing, and the finest gut leader shows up like a rope or cable. Early in the season sunshine is helpful, later an overcast sky is often favorable. Morning sun better than afternoon, yet at three in the afternoon, when the rays were deflected, I have approached a school of shy trout (say within twenty-five feet) in shallow water without alarming them. Of course I faced the sun. This was after midsummer. What is more, the fish were rising occasionally and I took several before they ran into the deep water.

We cannot always have just the sort of fishing we prefer, so it is best to take any we can get. Horseflies are a splendid bait for minnows and chubs, a well-tapered switch, black thread line and small hook or a needle heated and bent near the point. The latter is very good and does not injure the small fish which one wishes to keep alive.

### LARGE TROUT

F. S.  
AUGUST 5,  
1911

SEVERAL BIG TROUT have been killed recently by fishing after dark with rather large flies in deep pools on the Esopus. Mr. Willard Marsh took one in the "Green Deep" pool 19½ inches long, a thin trout that had evidently been fasting for some time. Last night Mr. William Dunn, after drawing the Green Deep blank, stopped at another pool on the way home, and after 11 o'clock P.M. hooked a four-pounder which he succeeded in landing after twenty minutes' play. This was an old "he" trout with a very pike-like head, and in rather poor condition. This fish fell a victim to the charms of the Cahill. I do not fancy that the pattern of large fly used is of the greatest importance. Something that has a full wing and plenty of hackle to give the effect of life or buzzing upon the surface. The land flies, all the moths, for instance, and many of the caddis (waterflies) are apt to buzz and flutter when on the water. At times it pays to sink the fly and work it very slowly, but this night fishing is not very satisfactory. It has not much of the refinement of fly-fishing. The fish

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cannot see you, although they can see objects in or on the water. It is the best way of getting upon terms of intimacy with big trout in the summer months when the water is low and they are in hiding during the daylight hours. There is no doubt that they can endure long fasts at this time. When the water is warm they take very little food of any kind, but a small freshet with a change to cool weather may bring them on the feed. Trout that have been hidden away under rocks, logs and abutments of bridges are usually dark in color and not as pretty as they should be, but a large female *fario* (brown trout), of the yellow variety, which has lived in bright water and a pool exposed to light and sunshine, is a very lovely fish with golden-yellow belly and the brightest of spots.



When it comes to form, the rainbow trout can contest the palm with any fish. Their heads are small and bodies beautifully formed after the style of a fresh run Atlantic salmon, and they improve in condition as the season advances. They are late-winter or early-spring spawners, yet I never saw evidence of spawning in any except trout over a pound in spring fishing. I remember taking a few large fish that were lank, and in which the vent was rather prominent in the early part of the season years ago. We have had little rain since June and the streams are very low. The hot weather seems to have extended to all parts of the country and almost put an extinguisher on fly-fishing during the day. The water is nearly as warm as the air, and no one expects good sport under such conditions.

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### LITTLE TALKS ABOUT FLY-FISHING

F. S. THE WOODCHUCK did not see his shadow this  
MARCH 2, 1912 year, so we may look forward to an early spring; that  
is, if we have faith in old saws and ancient superstitions. I never saw a woodchuck before April in this part of the country, but settling the weather is an important business engagement which an honest animal would hesitate to neglect.

It is often bitterly cold in February, but the days are perceptibly longer, and sunshiny ones are bright with the promise of spring and fishing.

The pleasures of anticipation, the making, mending or buying of rods and tackle during the long cozy evenings by the fireside; all these tend toward contentment and make this a cheerful season for which we should be grateful.

During the past year there has been much talk of dry-fly fishing and more anglers will try this method this season than ever before. Francis Francis, at one time editor of the *English Field*, was probably one of the best all-round anglers who ever lived, and in his very comprehensive work, "A Book on Angling," has much to say of the dry fly, but he loved all kinds of fishing.

It was not until after the publication of F. M. Halford's first book in 1886 that Americans paid much attention to the dry fly as a special art to be studied and practiced on our own waters. To those whose early education had been mostly on slow-flowing streams which were rich in insect life, the change from a wet to a dry fly was not difficult, as they had often used a single small fly fished up stream, and casting to rising trout was a common experience. It must be confessed, however, that we were completely fascinated by the art of the dry fly as practiced by the most scientific anglers on the chalk streams of the South of England. Frederic Halford's *magnum opus*, "The Theory and Practice of Dry-Fly Fishing" charmed many Americans, and for a time we tried to follow the lessons of this book too closely without making allowance for differences in conditions, particularly in mountain streams where there is much fast water.

Wherever trout feed upon surface food, sport may be had with



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a dry fly as is proved by the spread of the method, not only in Scotland and Ireland, but in this country. It is not the best way everywhere and all the time by any means, and if a man uses the artificial fly only in his trout fishing, he should (as Francis said) be a master of, or thoroughly understand, dry, wet and mid-water fly-fishing. No one man, no matter how skillful he may be, will ever know all that there is in fly-fishing, although there are some who are wonderfully expert, but wherever they go they find new and interesting problems to tackle.

If you find a big trout feeding upon minnows, it will usually disregard the most artfully presented dry fly, but with patience may be induced to take a wet one. Some waters are much richer in insect life than others, and whenever there are a lot of flies about, the larger or better class of fish take more interest in surface food. A really good rise of the insects born of the water will often put all the fish in the stream on the feed. You have thought perhaps that trout are rather scarce, when suddenly they are everywhere, big and little, in the pools and swift water, on the shallows and in places where you were sure there were no trout.

After heavy rains have washed much clay and dust from the roads into a clear stream, and fouled it, a remarkable show of trout may often be seen just after the water has become pure and clear again. It is probable that the discoloration and filth depressed the fish, and they show their pleasure in the return of normal conditions by rising and playing upon the surface. At such times they may neglect the artificial fly and there may be few natural ones on the water. The trout are sporting, not feeding in earnest.

The great floods of recent years have affected the supply of natural flies by carrying away or covering up the larvæ. The enormous quantities of stone, gravel and sand moved by these freshets is astonishing, and this seems the most reasonable explanation of the decrease in the numbers of the ephemera, caddis, stone flies, etc. May and June are the best months. We used to have good hatches of insects all summer, but now the water becomes too warm, most of our summers are very dry and the streams become low and stale. However, there are waters that are abundantly supplied with insects and their larvæ,

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

and where good rises of flies and trout may be seen. There is nothing more fascinating than fishing for rising trout or fish that you can see. It must be the hatching of the stone flies that brings good trout into water only a few inches deep. They know where the food is.

In May it is often cold and there may be no rise of flies until after noon. The trout may feed more or less all day, but the most profitable time will probably come between 12 and 3 P.M. As the weather becomes warmer, the rise comes in earlier and there may be several distinct rises during the day. In June there is always some show of insects after 5 o'clock P.M. I can remember times when the trout rose almost continually from 10 o'clock until 2 P.M. Those were great days, and one was sure to have all the trout he was entitled to between those hours, but it is years since I had anything so good. If you strike a good rise for an hour or two, you are lucky and will enjoy yourself. Of course a man will be happy on the stream, but I think he should have two or three good fish in his creel to feel contented and at his ease. It is depressing to carry an empty basket too long and a man in bad luck is apt to work too hard and become horribly fatigued. One big trout or a little good fortune sweetens a man's temper and enables him to appreciate the beauties of nature. The peaceful spirit and contented mind are what we wish fly-fishing to bring us.

## PRACTICAL RESULTS

F. G.  
MAY 4, 1912

WHY, MY DEAR Mr. Marston, there are no end of practical results [of fish stocking—Ed.], and I know of just a few of them. For instance, striped bass, one of the finest game fish of the Atlantic Coast, were planted on the Pacific Coast of California, where this fish was unknown. Literally thousands of tons of these fine fish have been netted for the markets, and great sport has been had with the rod for a number of years. Bass over forty pounds' weight have been killed. In many western streams the eastern brook trout is now found in considerable numbers. Brown trout and rainbows afford fine fishing with big fish in many States. The Sault Ste. Marie, connecting Lake Superior with

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Lake Huron, is now alive with magnificent rainbow trout, as about ten years ago the Government established a hatchery at the "Soo."

Trout up to eighteen pounds have been killed on the rod. Black bass have been introduced into the waters of most States, east and west, where there were no good fish, except perhaps small pickerel and perch. Even small lakes now afford good sport to the angler. The Delaware and Potomac are alive with bass almost from source to sea. For years there was fine rainbow trout fishing in the Esopus, below the range of the brook trout, but they stocked brown trout, and these have practically taken the place of both native brook and rainbow trout.

If the almost impassable dams had not blocked the way to the breeding grounds, the Hudson River would doubtless have become a good salmon river. One year about 300 good fish were killed, many of them in the shad-nets. Shad were nearly played out in the Hudson years ago, when the restocking was begun. . . . Pollution and close netting have injured the shad fisheries of the Hudson since then, but large numbers of the finest fish are still taken. Shad run in great numbers to the far upper waters of the Delaware. Without the hatcheries the supply of fish would have been exhausted. Small-mouth bass of large size are now taken in *California*. All over the country lakes and rivers are cursed with carp—one of the big mistakes of the Fish Commissions.

Seth Green put a few tiny bass which he hatched into an ice pond on the estate of a relative of mine, and the first thing we knew it fairly swarmed with big-mouth bass from one and a half to four and a half pounds' weight.

In nearly all parts of the country the good work of the Fish Commissions and hatcheries has borne abundant fruit in the shape of an increased supply of food and game fish. It is a matter of common knowledge. We put in applications for fry or fingerlings, and they are usually honoured. The Ontario and Western Railroad is taking an interest in restocking the streams upon its main line. It has always transported the cans of young trout free of charge.

I am not situated where I can get full information, but jot down a few things that I happen to know. If you have good water, well

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

stocked with food for fish, there is no question of your success in stocking them with game fish of the sort indicated by the conditions.

The mouth of the Delaware is probably too far south, but an experiment was made years ago. Success in this instance was hardly to be expected. Yet a few small salmon, after going to sea as smolts, did actually return to the far-distant upper waters of that beautiful river. Pike perch, or wall-eyed pike, have also been introduced into the Delaware successfully. . . .

[Our friend, Mr. Theodore Gordon, refers in the commencement of his interesting note to the fact that after quoting that over three billion fish eggs had been artificially "cultured" by the United States Fish Commission I said: "It would be interesting if the Bureau would give us some reliable statistics as to the *practical results* of all this artificial culture of fish in the United States." I have often referred to the success obtained with the striped bass, and it was that which led me to try to get the fish introduced into our waters. The shad has also been a great success—like the striped bass, a few were transferred from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and Mr. Gordon can tell us of thousands of tons of striped bass as a result. Seriously, I meant that it would be interesting to have with the reports of sowing billions of fry, the actual results in fish, say, now and ten years or five years ago.—R. B. M.]

## AN AMERICAN ANGLER'S PLAIN TALK ABOUT THE DRY-FLY

F. G.  
MAY 11, 1912

I AM ASKED so many questions in regard to dry-fly fishing nowadays that I think it will be best to answer them and condense my experience in the form of a short article or letter. One of the most common queries is, "Do you think it necessary to grease the line?" I know several good anglers of much experience who always "fat" their lines when fishing with a dry fly, but personally I do not like it, and rarely use mutton or red deer fat or tallow. The leader is apt to receive a share of the grease and float upon the surface in a way that to me is most disagreeable. I prefer to have the gut casting line just under the sur-

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

face, while the fly is floating quite dry and cocked. There may be nothing in it, but I think the connection of the line with the fly is much better disguised when the leader is below the surface. It certainly looks much more attractive to the angler, and I think that shy trout can scarcely fail to notice that straight line of gut right up to the floating fly.

“What flies are best for dry-fly work?” This is a large and interesting subject, but the fact is that many of our well-known patterns will kill well if dressed dry-fly fashion with plenty of hackle (legs). Cahills, Wickhams, Alders, and many others have been used successfully. The quill-bodied flies absorb but little moisture, are easier to dry, and need not be so full in the hackle. But if you use the “oil tip,” as it used to be called, even a wool-bodied fly can be floated without much labour. Kerosene is good enough for practical purposes, vaseline will answer, and there are a number of special preparations made expressly to anoint the flies. There are others which are used for the line. If you oil your fly too generously, it will sink, but the surplus oil will soon wash off, and then the fly floats well.

As to the rod, one with plenty of backbone is desirable, but one may fish dry with any good stream fishing-rod. When I first became enthused with the floating fly many years ago, I had what we would now call a black bass fly-rod made to order. It was excessively stiff and very hard to fish with. My arm would ache so at night after a day's casting that I could not sleep, and I have had rheumatism in that arm many times since. In our stream fishing, long casting is the exception, not the rule. Still, I must admit that I prefer a fairly powerful rod, and many rods are sold at moderate prices that are quite stiff enough, yet are easy to cast with. The stiffer the rod, the heavier the line required to bring out its action.

A man who has fished upstream in a low water with worm or fly has learned where the trout lie, and if no fish are rising he will know where to float his fly. There may be no insects upon the water, but the trout may be in position ready to feed, and will rise at any passing insect. I began with the idea that I must see the rise of a trout before casting my fly, as I had been reading books upon chalk-stream angling in England.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

I received much help from R. B. Marston and F. M. Halford. They assisted me greatly in selecting patterns, and I had read Mr. Halford's books. He was so kind as to send me a large number of floating flies in order that I might be able to make a selection of those most suitable and killing upon American waters.

Good anglers always help one another. For several years I always carried a box containing about fifteen dozen of the best English-tied flies to try whenever I saw decent trout rising. One afternoon I had a little experience that was helpful.\* I had been fishing the rapids upstream with two flies when I came upon a fine reach of smooth, gliding water, and sat down at the tail end to smoke a pipe and rest. While sitting there I spotted three good trout rising at the lower end of the pool, and taking off the stretcher fly, replaced it with a small float. I did not bother to remove the dropper, which happened to be a favourite fly of my own tying. Changing the tail fly occupied a few minutes, and in approaching the fish I naturally kept the flies in the air by a series of false casts. These dried the dropper so much that it floated quite as well as the orthodox dry-fly, and the result was that all three trout rose at it and were killed one after another. It seemed that they moved out of position to get it and passed by the tail fly. This was an eye-opener. It showed that a good wet-fly pattern,† if properly dressed with sufficient hackle, was also a good dry-fly pattern, and that my own flies could be made to float well. This gave me a great start, and added interest to the floating fly. It is an interesting, indeed fascinating method of fishing, and many good fishermen practise it. But do not forget your old lessons and the experience you have had in wet-fly fishing. If you have fished upstream on a low, clear water with a single fly, or even two, you have practically put in practice about all you will require in dry-fly fishing, except guarding against

\* T. G. told this story before in *Forest and Stream*, April 3, 1909.—FD.

† [I have often mentioned this fact in the *Fishing Gazette* and elsewhere. A little oil converts almost any good wet fly into a deadly dry fly, and it matters little whether the fly is "cocked" or not, so long as it floats on the surface. The angler who wants to shoot with both barrels should oil a tail fly and fish a dropper wet and sunk. The Derbyshire Bumbles, especially the "Honey Dun Bumble" and the "Mulberry Bumble," which are famous old wet patterns, are just as good dry—and fishing one dry and another wet is very interesting. You watch the dry fly, and if it is pulled under you strike; it adds to the fun to know the fish may hang the other fly in the weeds.—R. B. M.]

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

the drag. You have not dried and floated your fly, otherwise the difference in method is not extraordinary. No great revolution in fishing. Even the man who fishes worm upstream in low water has to keep out of sight, present his bait skilfully, and use all his knowledge of the habits of the trout. Stalking trout is not confined to dry-fly fishing.

The most interesting conditions for the floating fly are present when there is a good birth of natural insects—ephemeridæ or caddis flies, for instance—when the attention of the better class of trout has been attracted to the surface and they are rising freely. Then all your skill will be required in selecting your fly, and in presenting it dry, floating and cocked to each good trout in such a way that he will accept it in perfect confidence, instead of one of the naturals at which he has risen but a moment before.



### TROUT SEASONS IN SULLIVAN AND ULSTER

F. S. THOUSANDS OF ANGLERS in the big cities and  
MAY 18, 1912 various parts of the country are keenly interested in  
the trout streams of Sullivan and Ulster counties, in  
New York State. I have had letters from Chicago and the West, asking for information in regard to the fishing and prospects for sport. Many anglers have already taken a week-end or a few days from the push of business, while others are waiting impatiently for the opportune moment to arrive when they can board a fast express bound for the blessed country with its budding leaves, tender green foliage, homely fare—and trout. The season is quite an early one. The streams were high on opening day, May 1, but perfectly clear, and the fish were feeding well. Those I have seen were in fair condition, and several anglers have mentioned the strength and activity with which they fought for freedom.

Cold, pure water makes lively fish. Now and then there has been

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

a good hatch of natural flies, and several of the duns have killed well, medium to dark shades. It is a curious fact that a small Royal Coachman is often an excellent wet fly early in the season. I do not use it myself, preferring to stick to nature, and a more natural looking fly.

Baskets of from fifteen to twenty-five good trout have been caught by the fly-fishers. I have not heard of anything very large, but know of a number of fish weighing two pounds or better.

One of the best anglers among my friends killed thirty-five large trout on May 2 and 3, running up to eighteen inches in length. This is surely magnificent sport for hard-fished waters that are close to the great centers of population. One might not do as well in the wilderness.

The birds are here and all nature smiles when the spring sun is shining. We will not think of the days when the wind is from the northeast and chilly. Yesterday I saw two solitary snipe. This bird goes to the north of us late and yet is the first to return in August. The first one we see in that month reminds us that the autumn is near at hand.

The little sandpipers tipped up and down and made short flights in their usual style, and most of our well-known birds were well represented.

The wind was strong from the east; clouds were gathering, but the sun continued to shine and we much enjoyed our afternoon as we followed the winding stream through dense cover as well as open meadows. It is a great privilege to have an outing of this sort in the merry month of May. I am hopeful of a good season.





## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

### FLIES AND FLY-FISHING IN AMERICA—AN ORANGE GRANNOM

F. G.

JUNE 1, 1912

THE TROUT SEASON did not open this year until May 1. The first three days in the present month gave us lovely springlike weather. The streams were all very high but perfectly clear, and some excellent sport was had. The best basket that I know of was made by W. E. Holsey, a good friend of mine, and one of the best fishermen I know. It was so cold that there was no birth of flies or rise of trout until after 12 o'clock midday. He picked up an odd fish or two with minnow, but most of his trout were killed on rather large Duns in the last half of the day, fished dry. The basket for May 2 and 3 contained thirty-five trout from 14 in. to 18 in. long. This was in the lower Esopus in Ulster County (a splendid basket near New York). The weather has been so bad that the reports are very encouraging. On the Beaverkill last week there was a lot of fly on the water for a short time each day. One of these flies comes in in great numbers every year early in May, but I have always been too late for it. I should have sent a number of bottles containing the preservative solution to several men so that I might be sure of specimens. One friend had a supply of a fly we call the Orange Grannom, from the bag of eggs at the end of the body—I worked out the pattern three years ago—and last week he killed thirty-two trout up to 16 inches on it (parts of two days), and a few with a Whirling Dun with just a little fine green dubbing worked in with the hare's fur. You remember the materials you sent me from the collection of R. D. Blackmore, author of "Lorna Doone"? Some of this stuff has been very useful in imitating spinners. It seems to me that each of the large streams in this region is, to a certain extent, a law unto itself. Why should there be such a diversity in insect life? There are a number of flies common to all, but, on the other hand, a good number that seem to be peculiar to one stream. I hope that you are having a good season.

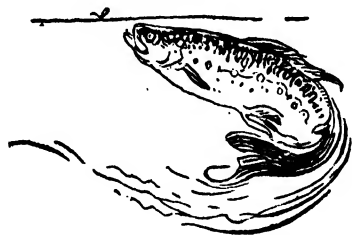
Is there anything in the way of materials I can send you? I have a remarkable collection of many things, as I have been at it since I was thirteen years old. The reports indicate plenty of trout everywhere, and I hope the season will prove to be a good one. A number

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

of delightful friends of mine got together recently and decided to send me a splendid "Leonard" rod, one of the "Tournament" class, made with a view to an English purchaser, for dry-fly. It is a very powerful  $5\frac{1}{4}$  oz. rod, a duplicate, I understand, of "Val Conson's" "Little Leonard." What a lovely thing to do!—to give a friend the finest rod that can be bought.

P.S.—I want to see the fly *on the water*, as well as to have specimens. Some years ago there was a great rise of the dark American Grannom on the Beaverkill after June 3, and I tied six patterns before I got one that would kill. Do not believe that I would have succeeded unless I had been on the water. I am satisfied that this fly rises in such multitudes only in exceptional years.

[Much obliged to Mr. Gordon for the offer of some material—some summer duck feathers are always welcome, as some of my friends prefer them to anything for May Flies. The late Mr. Dan. O'Fee used to say there was nothing equal to them, and made the biggest artificial Mays I ever used with them, but the smaller feathers are just as useful—more so, to my thinking. The material I sent Mr. Gordon was from a collection made originally by a keen old angler, Parson Gould, of Porlock, who used to fish the Exe, Barle, etc., and given by him to Mr. R. D. Blackmore, who kept them for many years, and then gave them to me. I have found when I have had time to make a few flies from them that they kill very well, including some capital saddle hackles for Sedge wings, etc. I think if I had my choice I should use points of hackles for wings of nearly all flies—they are far more delicate and transparent than feathers from wings. For beetles one can have even the double wings, one over the other, as recommended by Taylor in his capital book of more than 100 years ago.—R. B. M.]



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

### A FEW NOTES FROM AMERICA

F. G.      WHEN EXTREMELY WEARY, yet disinclined for  
JULY 6, 1912      wooing the drowsy god, I always collect a good bunch  
                         of the back numbers of the *Fishing Gazette*, settle my-  
self comfortably in bed, and read, read, read.

In one issue a contributor complained of the British workman because he was not successful in carrying out an idea for a new invention. The English artisan or mechanic is not at fault. It is very difficult for the mechanic of any country to realise and work out an invention the use of which he does not understand.

If he is fully informed on this point, an intelligent workman will put the inventor's idea into good form. Nearly all amateur fly-dressers have had difficulty in buying a vise that was entirely satisfactory in use, but you will find that all amateurs who have mechanical ability inherent in their make-up, whether their lives have been passed as bankers, merchants, or professional men, always make their own vises out of good tool steel, and have no difficulty whatever. I have known three or four such men, all good fly-dressers, and have always envied them their "knack" with tools. Only the other day an architect, who built the new public school here, showed me two beautiful split-cane rods which he had made himself. They would have been creditable to a Hardy or a Leonard, and the more powerful weapon of the two is a really first-rate dry-fly rod of easy action, yet with sufficient "backbone."

A friend who had spent thirty-five years in a bank made his own split-cane trout and salmon rods. The former were peculiar in action, very stiff in butt and middle, with fragile, soft tips—the weakest split-bamboo tips I ever saw.

The reason was not far to seek. He was a particularly expert performer with the wet-fly, and sometimes killed larger trout than I did with the floating fly under similar conditions. He always used very fine-drawn gut, and his casting lines were neatly made up with very small loops between or joining the links. The soft top was to save breakages in the strike, just as lancewood is advocated by men who habitually use hair instead of gut for fly-fishing. Two years or more

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

ago, Holland sent me a tapered casting line for dry-fly fishing made up in the same way, and it proved durable and good in every way; but the loops must be very small and neat.

May was a good month for the trout fishers, and nearly everyone had first-rate sport on "Memorial Day," May 30. One friend reports returning over thirty good trout in the afternoon, a very remarkable performance on our hard-fished waters.

I heard recently of a fine opportunity for creating a preserve—a lake and stream with much land, adjoining a State forest reserve and another large club preserve. The lake of fifty to sixty acres is stocked with native trout (*fontinalis*), and the stream (small) with brown trout (*fario*). A good club-house has just been built upon the property, which is now owned by an individual.

I rather fancy the proposition, but to make it inexpensive one would be obliged to have a fairly large membership. The shooting in the autumn is fair.

Last week I renewed my acquaintance with a native-born dry-fly fisher, who never read a book upon the subject, but picked up his ideas upon the stream. He was troubled because he could get no more flies of a pattern which he had found very killing. You may imagine my surprise when he said that it was called "Flight's Fancy." I told him that I would look up Mr. Halford's pattern, which was sure to be correct, but it was some time before we got just what was required. It proved to be an *American* Flight's Fancy, and the following is the dressing:—

Wings: Palish dun (young starling would be good). Legs: Two ginger hackles. Body: Light yellow crewel, with slight greenish tinge. Ribbed with narrow, flat gold tinsel. Tail: Yellow dun hackle fibres.

It has the appearance of a good fly for the Neversink and other streams, and I shall try it myself when some of the yellow-bodied flies are hatching.

The Irish fly-makers seem to be first-rate hands with the dye-pot. Michael Rogan was quite wonderful in this respect. I saw some old salmon flies of his tying in 1909, and they were beautiful; but many other men have made a reputation as salmon fly-dressers in Ireland. I received some dyed hackles from Ireland recently that seem to be

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

quite perfect in colouring, and five sample salmon flies of excellent workmanship. One of these (the most brilliant) has no less than five hackles of different colours on the body, but I fancy the little chaps. There is a Fiery Brown that would please the most critical. It might even kill an old "he" trout in one of your chalk streams, if fished when the light began to fail in the evening. The hooks upon which these flies are dressed are very good, with large, slightly upturned eyes, first-rate for a figure-of-eight, or even a loop of rather fine gut—what you would call grilse or lake gut.

There has been a fine show of caddis this season; even the big stick caddis is quite plentiful, which has not been the case for some years. Large brown trout are fond of this, and swallow its stick and grub, or larva. I had often found the woody fibres of the case in their stomachs. Last week the trout in the lower reaches of the large streams were devoting their attention mostly to minnows and bottom food.

In these lower waters the chub have been horribly annoying. I have never been troubled by them before until really warm weather set in for the summer.

To have one's perfect little fly continually drowned, mussed up and chewed is most exasperating. The wretches seem to be inordinately fond of a small floating fly; but, for the matter of that, they will eat almost anything. On the Delaware, where big chub abound, they will take minnows, lamperns, crayfish, frogs, hellgramites, spoons, spinners, or one of the many hooked bass baits which are so much used nowadays. It is a curious fact that large chub will often bite a large minnow quite in two, leaving only the head and shoulders upon the hook. It would seem that they must take the minnow well down into the throat in order to effect this, but they often get away with half the bait, without being pricked by the hook.

I intended to say that an amateur fly-dresser might have a vise made in any form that pleased him, provided the screw which forces the jaws together is made with a deep, slow twist. This gives power, and there will be none of that wagging of the small hook, or springing out, which is so exasperating. My patience had been greatly tried, so I sent to New York for a regular jeweller's bench vise. The big jaws are horribly in the way, but the hook is set like a rock, and you

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

can dress your Wickham in peace and comfort. I like just a film of floss silk over the tying silk—it makes the bodics appear softer and brighter.

With the spread of dry-fly fishing in Ireland, Scotland and America during recent years, the amateur fly-dresser finds some difficulties. He has made his own salmon, sea-trout or brook-trout flies on gut or turned-down eyed hooks, and naturally turns his hand to building dry-flies, usually on Mr. Hall's hooks with upturned eyes. If the eye is set at almost a right angle to the shank, it interferes more or less with the free action of the thumb and forefinger, and we change our method of fingering a bit. If one wishes to retain his "knack" in tying single-strip and built wings, it is well to tie a few salmon flies occasionally. It is quite an art to set on these wings in perfect form, so that they will play properly in the water, and no one wishes to lose it. The floating fly is a different bird. One may say it is "built" usually with the help of a vise, and not "tied" in the old way, with the fingers unassisted.

I mentioned this because I was bothered for some time to get back to my old form in tying strip-wing lures for a young relative of mine. I spoiled several pairs of wings before I got them to sit right, each on its own side of the hook, and with correct play in the water. I have spent many happy hours in studying and working on artificial insects of all sorts, and do not consider the time ill-spent. As for the naturals, the ephemera, caddis, and other water-born insects afford a great field for work and pleasure. It would require two or three lifetimes, or a number of men working together, to do it any sort of justice in a big country like this. The forms of insect life vary greatly in different parts of the country.

It seems strange that, in spite of the great improvements made in all kinds of fishing-tackle, we frequently have the same troubles in buying hooks that Francis Francis wrote so feelingly of many years ago. For some reason unknown to me, manufacturers rarely stick to exactly the same design in a hook that pleases us. The twist is changed a trifle, the shank shortened, or the wire used is heavier. Sometimes the points are dull, not sharp, as in the earlier batches sent out. I have a lot of Hall's eyed hooks with the eye on one side—heavy, lopsided things, which makes a ridiculous fly.

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### A FEW NOTES FROM AMERICA

F. G.  
OCTOBER 12,  
1912

SINCE REMOVING TO the country some months since I have been looking for the correct caper in rams, for "Tup's Indispensable," and have collected sundry wads of wool from dirty white, through yellow and grey, to black, all filled with the natural grease of the animal.

I cannot say that I am pleased, and, anyhow, I hate wool. Without the seal's fur Tup dubbing would appear to poor advantage. I have tried mixtures of pig's wool, seal's fur, mohair, crewel and furs in endeavours to eliminate the sheep's wool.

I have tried to trace the origin of the "Newport Folly," and I strongly suspect that it sprang full-fledged from the fertile brain of Mr. Wadham. I point my finger at him and say, "Thou art the man."

A friend of mine swears by this fly; so I had best give the dressing for the benefit of generations yet unborn, who will surely wish to read all the back numbers of the *Fishing Gazette*. Wings, coot. Legs, cuckoo or Plymouth Rock hackles. Body, 'Tup mixtures, or as near as possible (cream and red seal's fur looks well). Tail, grey hackle fibres.

The said Mr. Wadham accomplishes some wonderful stunts with celluloid, in flies and baits. Artificial flies are made in all sizes and in innumerable patterns, fanciful and imitations of nature. Great brilliancy is attained when desired, and any colour for bodies.

We owe this use of celluloid to Mr. R. B. Marston, who some years ago sent me specimens of Olive Duns dressed with bodies of this material. They much resembled peacock quills in effect, but were much more durable. By tying quill-bodied flies weeks or months before they are used in fishing, they get set to the hook and last longer, or one can run an almost invisible gold wire over the quill. If not too troublesome, wind the wire the reverse way over the quill, taking two or three close turns over the tail-end of body.

The extensive use of the dye-pot in Mr. Halford's new patterns is not always satisfactory in hackles and wings. Anyone who has tried it knows how difficult it is to dye to shade and have the colour fast. When possible, I much prefer Nature's colouring in feathers.

An expert angler wished for a good Red Spinner, and got the col-

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

our he wanted by using *pink* silk for the body. This turns red or red-brown when oiled or wetted.

An interesting idea from an angler of great experience is that a light but soft material absorbs and retains the oil better than quill or hair, and is more satisfactory. This is a good reason for preferring old John Hammond's "Champion" with chenille body to any other pattern of Mayfly. I have studied all the illustrations of the English Mayflies I could find, and must have seen one hundred patterns made in imitation of it.

It is evidently a fly of variegated plumage. The geological formation of the stream bed and richness of the soil probably influence the colour and size of the fly; also cold or warm weather during the hatching period may affect the coloration.

If one follows the birth of all insects that are being taken by the trout, he will find that he has not used a very large number of patterns during the whole season, and may use the same fly day after day. If one is satisfied that this is correct, he can devote his whole attention to presenting it to the trout. This is usually more important than the pattern, and we often make mistakes. A wary old trout is mighty easily scared, and, no doubt, we scare a good many without knowing it.

Imagine your humble servant crawling on hands and knees over horrible stones for a considerable distance. We know where the big trout lies, or think we know. At the first cast a large dark object rushes off the shallow water on the far side of the pool, from *below our position*, and never stops until safely hidden in his holt. He has been lying where he can see across and down stream, as well as up, his rear being protected by a high, precipitous bank, and has no doubt been an interested spectator of our movements. However, we had it out with him one day, and he retained my pretty fly as a souvenir.

I have sent for Mr. Leonard West's new book, which I saw advertised in the *Fishing Gazette*, and have no doubt that it will prove interesting.

We get much pleasure and many hints from books, but the best masters to study under are the trout. Some of the best fishers (dry and wet) that I have ever known had never read a book on angling.



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

They had studied the streams and the fish, and no one would wish to see prettier work. In the old time native anglers made their own rods, usually from hickory or shad blow. The former was the stronger wood. These rods were made in two pieces, often permanently joined by a simple ferrule, or spliced. They were very heavy, and required a good strong arm and wrist in their users. On the old slow-flowing streams I formerly fished they used but one fly, and fished it beautifully. Of course, on such waters small flies were the rule, and special patterns were tied for them. There were men who had no reels, and in this case they cast about 40 ft. from the tip of the rod, the surplus line being wound round on this. When a trout was hooked the rod was dropped into the hollow of the left arm, and the fish was played by hand. I often fished in this way when I was a boy, only using the reel to lengthen or shorten the line. I have tried to land fish in the old way by seizing them behind the gills, when played out, but it is too risky. We used to do it as a matter of course when wading, and lost very few trout; but we have lost the knack in the years that have passed. I fancy that it is safer to strand a big fish when alone than go for him with a short-handled net; but this depends upon the stream and the place.

I love to watch a good man work a pair of oxen. There is no goad, only a little switch, and the man walks ahead or at the left of his team. Oxen seem stupid creatures, but they work beautifully together, when trained by an experienced hand. A few words or a touch of the switch, to direct their efforts, is all that is necessary. Success with all animals depends upon a well-controlled temper, quiet determination, and experience. A horse that has been bred and raised by such a person is a delightful creature. He has absolute confidence in his master, will face anything in his company, and follow him anywhere. We love a fine horse, but oxen are the poor man's labourers, as the cost of their keep is very small. Much of this region was cleared of timber with their aid.

Muskrats seem to travel a good deal in September, probably on the approach of the rutting season. They are larger than the English

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

water rat, and have lovely soft fur. Pick out the long, stiff hairs, and you have fine dubbing for dun-coloured flies, in two or three shades. It spins much nicer than mole's fur, as the latter is very short in fibre. The skin of the common Irish or English mole is much heavier and stronger than the American, but I fancy that the latter is the prettiest. Two kinds of common rat-skins came to me from Ireland, with two or three hares' ears. I do not use them (the rats), but a good hare's ear makes first-rate dubbing. I shot a big varying hare one November that was still in the summer coat, and is very good for flies. They appear as white as snow in winter, but it is only the ends of the hairs that are entirely white. They love evergreen swamps, but if forced out by dogs go off across country like a fox. They circle, and come back in time, but are devils to run and jump. They are not as plentiful as they were a few years ago.

The owner of a little country hotel told me that he had eighty-one angling guests in May and the early part of June. His house is twenty miles from the railroad, but these represented but a very small portion of the men who fished the same stream at that time. All fish for the large brown trout, while most of the restocking of recent years has been with native trout. Is it surprising that one hears complaints as to small fish? We all wish to catch the big fish of any water. Sport is sport, and fun is fun. I will fish for minnows if there is nothing else to be had; but minnows do not excite one, or cause one to dream dreams. If your chalk streams were free to all, what sort of dry-fly fishing would you have? The worm, minnow, and maggot would play the devil with them. If everyone is to have equal opportunities, the rank and file will have to exercise some self-restraint, which they are little inclined to do. There are short periods in spring when trout seem quite bold and feed freely. At such times great quantities of the best trout may be killed. One man, not satisfied with a basket of fish, kept on until he had three creels filled, and a few hire experienced native anglers to fish for them. An old gentleman, fishing preserved water, got 38 lb. and then bought a 3 lb. trout to top off his load of fish. The first to be killed must have been a bit soggy and stale when he arrived home.

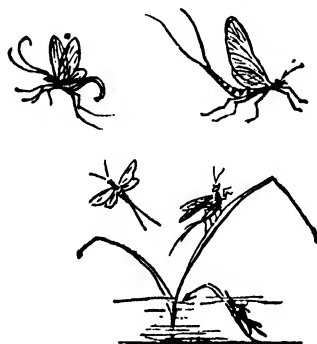
## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Theories may be very good, and it is delightful when they work out practically, but for the most part our theories are most interesting to ourselves. I love to read the works of men of great experience, who picture their sport as it is. Mr. Halford's brief, advocating his patterns of artificial flies, is delightful, and we go with him when he fishes. What fun it was when his friend was taking big fish on a "Tup" to convert him to the Black Gnat (male). It grieves me, however, that such large Itchen trout were so indiscriminate. Just contrast the Tup and Black Gnat. But those fish must have been strong on the feed, and would have taken any one of a number of flies, if of the right size, and skilfully presented. I had several sorts of hooks this year, the very best, and used them all. My conclusion is that one may please himself, and lose but little, if he can procure them as designed. Also that at different times and places either fine wires or stout wires may be required. A long shank may be best for one fly and a rather short shank for another. (Sharp points cannot be too strongly insisted upon.) A first-rate Hall is hard to beat. Unfortunately for me, the original patterns as designed by Mr. Hall never reached me—must have been lost in mail or in Custom House, although there were only a few of them. I pay 45 per cent. duty on *bare* hooks. How would you like that? Uncle Sam, in brotherly love, is probably trying to protect somebody, but I cannot imagine who, unless it is the British fly-dressers. They are not too well paid, I imagine. If they could have half a day on a stream every week, how much more they would enjoy their work. I love to tie my flies from day to day, and often put up the last one tied. We would have had fine sport with the ants this year if the weather had been fair, but a good rise in the afternoon would be the signal for a cold change in the weather, and no more ants would come to the water for days. They seem to need warmth and sunshine. Why are they so fond of coming to the water as soon as they appear in the winged state?

The season has been trying—hot when we wished for cool airs, and very cold when heat was required. A drought was followed by much rain and flood, and when wet weather set in it stayed set, and could not stop staying set. It was ever thus from childhood's hour.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

Powers of observation can be cultivated in the angler, but in a few men they are innate. They seem to see everything that is worth seeing, and register automatically. There is a heap of thin, thoughtless observation, which makes trouble or leads one astray. I know of a hatchery that was badly located, when good sites were to be found in the neighbourhood. It proved to be rather a fizzle, and cost considerable money.



### A LITTLE TALK ABOUT THE ANGLER'S FLIES

F. G.  
FEBRUARY 8,  
1913

THE STUDY OF the insects born of the water and forming a considerable portion of the trout's food is one proposition. The imitation of these delicate creatures is another, and requires much time, labour, and close attention to detail. The hard-worked business or professional man whose recreation is angling can by close observation become sufficiently acquainted with the insects most favoured by the trout for all practical purposes. He will, if he is a believer in imitation, have sufficient knowledge of the insects that prevail upon the waters he fishes to guide him in the selection of his artificial flies, and will know naturals when they appear, also their seasons and when to expect them. He has not much leisure for fly-dressing, nor for the endless task of searching for and buying perfect materials that will satisfy him and enable him to realise his ideals. Many of the best amateur fly-

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

tiers purchase a portion of their stock, thus saving time for the creation of a few favourite patterns. They know that enormous stocks of well-dressed artificials are carried by the best shops, and that they can match most flies in size and colour. However, their fingers are often busy in leisure hours, and there is great satisfaction in killing trout with the work of one's own hands.

A well-made artificial fly having a natural appearance and having good colours put into it may answer for more than one species.

Dun, for instance, is a common colour among insects, from grey to almost purple, a dark blue dun. Yellow is another standard colour, from a pale fleshy yellow through delicate primrose to orange. Brown is quite fashionable, particularly for evening wear, although in spring it is quite proper in the morning, and may run from a soft yellowish brown to brown-red. Black is never out of season, and is *comme il faut* for bugs and gnats of many sorts.

I have even collected a black spinner, a perfect day fly with clear wings.

The family names of all the gnats and midges need not trouble us over-much. We want only the position of the wings, colour, and size of these tiny creatures. Many of the day flies and caddis are extremely small, but are easily recognised. The larger trout are not much given to midging on our mountain streams, unless these insects are superabundant. If any man wishes to tackle a tough proposition, let him try for a big trout that is rising at tiny insects in quiet water that is as clear as glass (and as smooth). Unless the fish happens to be unsophisticated and will accept a fly of respectable proportions, the task is a difficult one. Then, if ever, one wishes for invisible gut and the hand of a fairy. Trout that are feeding, or ready to feed, in rough or crinkly water are easy if the surroundings are such that we can present the fly from the correct position and place it so that it floats down naturally.

A fly dressed after a day may answer for one of the caddis of similar coloration. Pull off the tail if you like, but it assists in balancing and floating the fly. When the caddis flutters, its wings are up. When in the air and sunlight, its buzzing wings and the legs give one the impression of a little halo around the body. The stone flies often

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

raise their big wings when running on the water, and when laying eggs of course their wings are up. Because of the colour of the wings the English Yellow Sally is often used for one of our caddis flies; but a simple yellow hackle of the right shade will often kill better, and I have seen a yellow tag do good work. Hackle flies may be made to float and kill well. I have used what are called spent spinners a great deal, and these are supposed to represent the day flies in the very last stage of their existence, but mine are not always spent. Some insects carry their eggs in a bag at their hinder ends, and when this is conspicuous it must be quite attractive to the trout. The insect may deposit its eggs in one parcel by a single dip in the water, but then again it may not. I have seen them come down from a height, make one dip and fly away, but many flies dip a number of times in one place, then fly a short distance and do it again. I have seen an insect come out from a bush and pound up and down like a piece of machinery, then fly back to the bush. The female stone flies are heavy and clumsy in laying eggs. They are sometimes caught by the current and carried down stream a short distance before they can rise again.

The common stone fly appears on these waters in limited numbers, throughout the season, but there are other species of this fly that have a short season during which they are plentiful. One of these is quite fat and more yellow than the common species. Some of the western rivers have great hatches of stone flies. We have at least two species of mayfly (*Ephemera*), and probably many more. I have had specimens of three that I thought differed most decidedly in coloration and even in size, but colour is not very reliable in distinguishing the species in fish and flies. Some familiar insects rise in multitudes one year and are scarce the next season. Any angler of experience can select an assortment of artificial flies that will kill well on all waters where the dry-fly is good medicine. As the years pass, he picks up a pattern here and there and stows it away in his box for a special occasion. He has known days when one little shabby fly made all the difference between a full creel and a few small trout, and he has an eye for any fly of perfect coloration.

One day last June I would have (cheerfully) paid \$2 for just one more fly. I had tied only one, as I fancied it too dark for the season,

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

and the hackles were too rare to waste. However, there was a tremendous rise of these dark caddis flies. Many were hatching out, while older insects were laying eggs and doing stunts in the air over the water. All the water and the air over it seemed full of excitement, and the trout were crazy. I broke my hook in extracting it from the hard roofing of a big trout's mouth, and there I was with the fish rising under my nose. I tried pattern after pattern, and did kill one trout with a very dark Hare's Ear, but that was all. I put in the broken fly by way of experiment, and rose six large fish one after another. We do not have these opportunities often in a season, but I shall not stock up with this fly. Its period is too short, as next day the show of fly was not great, and I had difficulty in finding a good fish. They had dropped down on to the shallow water while I was patiently fishing the pools. However, I found them before dusk and killed three, every one of which made a grand rush for his pool the instant he felt the hook. On leaving the water, the dun (sub-imago) does not move about much after finding a good resting-place, sheltered from the wind and sun until it undergoes the transfiguration into a spinner, or perfect insect of the ephemeridæ, and the latter will often remain at rest for a day or two.

I have had them under observation at large and also in boxes. When a man takes to the floating fly it is well for him to have had much experience of wet-fly fishing, not only with lures, but with small imitations of Nature. He will not be apt to affect or feel superiority, as he knows that there is a science of the wet fly as well as of the dry.

Big trout are at times averse to breaking the surface, and in waters where they feed almost entirely upon minnows, the floater may only tempt the small fish. A man who confines himself to fly-fishing on free waters should be proficient with the wet, dry, and even the sunk fly. If there are very big trout about, you want one of them, and there is this to be said for the artificial purist: he develops all that is inherent in the fly. Small wet flies and imitations of the nymphs are being used to some extent on the chalk streams of England, the home of the dry fly for a great many years. If the trout are feeding just under the surface upon immature insects, why not meet them there? The larvæ and remains of grub cases will often be found in their

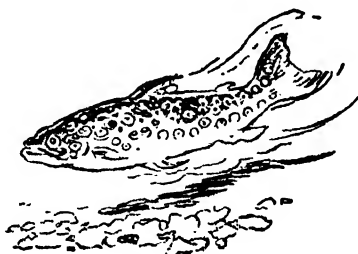
## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

stomachs. We fish the dry fly because it is most interesting, not because superior. There have been some wonderfully clever men with the wet fly.

While we have a wonderful variety in insect life, and many more large flies than are found on English waters, we also have many flies that approximate British species in size and colour. For instance, we have lovely little red spinners, Jenny spinners, yellow and blue duns, big spring browns, and many others. We have whacking big red spinners and many caddis flies different from any described by English writers. Even when one finds insects that are very similar in size and colour, they are not quite the same.

I found a lot of small ephemeridæ that appeared to be dull Jenny spinners, but saw that they were duns (sub-imagos). After shedding their coats they appeared as lovely little spinners with clear glassy wings. The markings at the tail end and thorax were similar to the English jenny. A similar but larger fly had only a touch of colour below the wings.

When insects are plentiful upon the water, or have been so recently, imitation may be of great importance, but when the trout are in position to feed, they may be quite ready to accept any natural-appearing fly if it is presented attractively. Theories are interesting, but of little value unless they have been tested on the stream. We can theorise as much as we please and fish as much as we are able during many years, but there is always something new to learn—some fresh difficulty to be conquered.





# THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

## LITTLE TALKS ABOUT FLY-FISHING

CHAUCER (*mysteriously*):

Hush!

Mine own true mistress is sweet Out-of-doors.  
No Whitsun lassie wears so green a kirtle,  
Nor sings so clear, nor smiles with such blue eyes  
As bonny April, winking tears away.  
Not flowers o' silk upon an empress' sleeve  
Can match the broidery of an English field.  
No lap of amorous lady in the land  
Welcomes her gallant as sweet Mistress Earth  
Her lover. Let Æneas have his Dido!  
Daffydowndilly is the dame for me.

F. S.      IT IS SAID that the present winter has been the  
FEBRUARY 22,      mildest experienced in this country since 1843, and  
1913      robins and bluebirds were deluded into coming North  
            in January.

Such being the conditions, it was but natural that all members of the great fraternity of anglers should develop severe cases of spring fever at mid-winter. If buds were swelling and pussy willows were in bloom, it must be time to think of going fishing, and they longed to be up and away. But bide a wee, gentlemen, we must be content with the pleasures of anticipation for many weeks to come, and the weather gods may play us many a trick before All Fools' Day. In fact, they have just begun to get busy and are now giving us a taste of real wintry weather. Except on the riffles and swift water the larger trout streams are now frozen over, and all the land is dressed in white. We are expecting a good crop of ice from the ponds and lakes. We must all do a great deal of thinking before the season opens on May 1, and in many ways this is a delightful part of the fisherman's year. He is looking forward hopefully and enjoying the best of sport in his mind. Anticipation plays a large part in the pleasures of fly-fishing, and there is really quite a lot of things to do. Rods and tackle must not be neglected until the last moment, and we must make good all deficiencies. There is much pleasure in inspecting the old stock of artificial flies and in buying or dressing new ones. Time flies fast always, and as the years pass, it seems to get away more and more rapidly. We have not days enough in the week to do all that we wish or intend to do.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

Last season was a good one for caddis flies (*Trichoptera*), the one with wings sloping over the back. Many were dun-colored, light or dark. I did not see as many browns as usual. There should be lots of them in the evening. The stoneflies were a fair crop (those flies with four wings that lie flat on the body, *Perlidae*), but were not often on the water in great numbers on the streams we fished. The well-beloved *Ephemeridae* (day flies) were very plentiful a few years ago, but they suffered much from great floods that played the deuce with the bottoms of the streams where the larvæ are in hiding. These beautiful insects, with their upright wings, delicate bodies and long tails, are found in great variety, of many colors and of all sizes. Also there are usually a few of the mosquito-like crane flies about, and land flies and bugs are blown on the water or seek it as the ants do, when they take wing in fine weather. A little experience enables a man to select suitable artificial flies for the waters he fishes, but we prefer imitations, or typical flies that are life-like and natural-appearing on the water. The best of these resemble well-known insects in size and color, with a very few exceptions, which may pass for bugs or be used simply as lures to attract the trout. Many old American wet flies kill well as floaters, if well hackled. In fact, any fly will float, if oiled, but we wish the dry fly to cock up and float just as the water-bred insects do. They are not afraid of the element in which they live during the greater portion of their lives.

Many of our insects differ greatly from those found in Great Britain, yet others are closely akin in color and size to English flies. All manufacturers have their own patterns, and considerable differences will often be noted in imitations which are named the same. We prefer to tie our own and like to think that we follow nature, but the longer one studies the insects, the less easily one is pleased with his counterfeits. We have been as much as two years at work before a pattern was really satisfactory, even though it killed trout. There is so much in the presentation of the fly and in keeping out of sight of the keen vision of the fish. Their eyes are practically their only protection, and they quickly detect movement, yet they cannot distinguish form as we do. They feel pretty safe in a large body of water, but during drouths and in the smaller class of streams, one must use

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

great circumspection if he desires the larger fish. Again, the fishing of broken water, where the surface is disturbed by current, wind or eddies, is usually much easier than taking trout from smooth, calm water, which flows slowly, and has no great depth. We scare lots of trout in such places and seldom know it. It is most interesting to fish for the larger trout that have seen many baits and flies and have probably been hooked several times. One difficulty is to find them in position to feed and in the humor to do so, and the next is to place the fly softly, without splash, and so accurately that it will float over them naturally an inch or two to the right or left of the trout's nose. Of course when lying near the top of a pool they may come some distance and take quite a large fly. They are often ready for any food in such places, and the disturbed water covers any deficiencies in the fly, and to some extent its presentation.

Long lists of flies are published and much advice has been given as to the selections to be made from these, but we like to know where, and at what time, a man expects to fish. Early in the season the trout will often take a big fly that might scare them later, and they are hungry and not very particular. Most of the duns are good, and one may need a brown or yellow-bodied fly. A few spinners may not come amiss, and many anglers like No. 10 hooks. I like No. 12, and often use smaller sizes on low water. One cannot lay down rules, as I have raised large trout to big flies when they disdained midgits. You might not care to disturb yourself to go for one peanut when there were no more in sight. Dun is generally the word for the sub-imago of the *Ephemera*, but dun-colored or bluish-gray flies are found among the American *Trichoptera*, light or dark. In old times, dun seems to have meant red, as a dun bull or dun cow. In some parts of the old country "bloa" (pertaining to the color of the clouds) is used instead of dun. Lead color might be used for the wings of many flies.

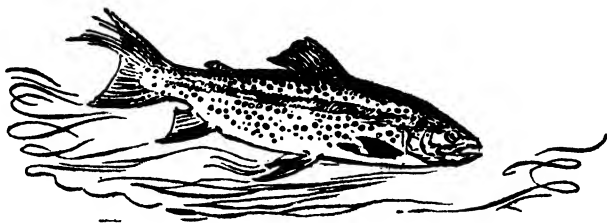
We all have pet flies in which we have great confidence, and if one has confidence in his fly, he can devote his entire attention to presenting it to the trout in the most natural and attractive style. We doubt if we could kill good trout with some of the patterns used successfully by other anglers, and they might not care for some of our favorites. Yet I notice that some unknown flies quickly win their way,

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

if well designed and natural in appearance. We are all hoping for a first-rate season, with plenty of good trout for everyone. There was much high water in the early part of the winter, but very little ice. Many fish were seen in the spawning beds, but naturally bred fry have a hard time of it. Many applications for fingerlings have gone to Albany, and we must all do what we can to restock the free waters which are so hard fished.

When one considers the rapidly growing army of anglers, the problem of giving them sport becomes an interesting one. If we could conserve the streams and prevent the damage done by floods and ice, if we could break the force of the current, stop the masses of shifting stones here and there, and have plenty of deep water and hiding places for the trout, much would be accomplished. The streams would support a greater head of trout, the food supply would be better and insects (and their larvæ, of course) would be more plentiful. Low dams of reinforced concrete, well placed and anchored, would not be costly, and would greatly improve the fishing. We all wish for trout of good size and to have plenty of them. On free water they are fished for in every way, while in preserved or private reaches the rule is fly-fishing only. This leaves the trout many opportunities to feed in safety, as they will not always take flies, and often feed freely in colored water. We must provide for all kinds of fishermen in these large streams if it is possible.

Every man requires a hobby of some sort to divert his mind from the cares and worries from which none of us is free, and fly-fishing is peculiarly fascinating in anticipation, realization and retrospect. One may begin as a child, or take up the rod late in life; it makes little difference in one's enthusiasm. Once a fly-fisher, always a fly-fisher, and I fancy that the man who sticks to the fly, uses nothing else, has the



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

best of it, although he may not kill so many trout. Sometimes it requires considerable strength of mind to break the chain of business and go where we long to be, but "a stitch in time save nine," and even a few days on the streams in the spring time, while the air is fresh and bracing and all the world is young, will do much for a man's health and strength.

The bit of sport and change of scene renew his youth, and he feels like a boy again.

The spirit of the boy lies dormant in many of us, and only needs to be released by just going fishing.

Good luck.

### AN ENGLISH DRY-FLY ROD, ETC.

F. S.  
MARCH 22,  
1913

A TYPICAL ENGLISH dry-fly rod has been sent to me to try—not a rod made for America, but the sort that those English dry-fly men prefer who will not use an American rod.

It is most interesting to compare its action with the actions of fine Leonard and Payne dry-fly rods, and it shall have the fairest possible trial. It certainly balances remarkably well, and most careful attention has evidently been paid to all details. It was built under the supervision of a master of the floating fly and was tried by half a dozen others who all approved of it, considering the action correct. Of course a line must be chosen to suit it, and I have on hand F, E and D. There is more cane in the top than in a fine American rod, and I fancy that only Tonquin cane will give the great stiffness and resiliency attained by makers such as Leonard in joints of small diameter. The tournament rods have extraordinary power with least weight, and a good few Englishmen prefer them for chalk stream fishing. This occasioned a great controversy some years ago, which, without doubt, led to considerable alterations and improvements being made in English fly rods.

Lovers of the Neversink will be disgusted to learn that a sawmill has been moved up to the "Big Bend," one of the refuges for large trout during low water and drouths. Every stick of timber down to

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

six inches in diameter will be cut, and it is reported that the sawdust will be disposed of in the stream. I can scarcely believe that this is true. No river in the country has such lovely "white" water as the Neversink, and in spite of damage by floods and wood chopping, it is still one of the most beautiful of our large streams. A good number of the best native anglers and landowners have put in applications for fingerling trout, and these will be distributed carefully, and to the greatest possible advantage.

Nowadays the best sportsmen think of putting trout in as well as taking them out, and endeavor to provide for the future and the younger generation of anglers. We do not wish to kill great numbers of trout, but to be able to find a few fish of size and quality, which will require a little skill and afford exciting sport—the kind that one is pleased to show and that present a handsome appearance when served upon the table.

The best anglers are apt to go where there is at least a chance of hooking a really big trout, and at present a good many fishermen are a bit uncertain where they will first wet their lines this season. I have fished the Ulster and Sullivan county streams so frequently of recent years that I feel some little inclination for the unknown or to return to streams that I have not seen for years. I found an old photograph of my first camp in the Maine wilderness recently, and it recalled many delightful memories, but I shall probably put my trust in one of the hard-fished streams in New York or Pennsylvania, where there are no black flies or midges. One becomes attached to certain waters, and I notice that men come from all directions and from places far away to fish these old streams which have been celebrated for fifty years or more. They are associated with the names of nearly every well-known angler who flourished during the nineteenth century and have furnished sport for many thousand fishermen. One thinking of speculative changes usually remembers that he may go further and fare worse. Undoubtedly there is much first-rate dry-fly fishing within 200 miles of New York City, which is not well known or much exploited.



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

### CROSSING BIRDS FOR FLY-TYING

F. G.      THE HACKLES I SENT you marked Rhode Island  
APRIL 19, 1913      Reds were from a cock having a cross of brown Leg-  
horn. This improves the hackles decidedly; they lose  
nothing in colour. The Leghorn is a smaller bird, and often has good  
brown hackles. Cross *black* Andalusian on pure-bred single-comb  
*white* Leghorn and one half the chicks should be blue-grey or dun.  
Blue Andalusian on brown Leghorn might give one or two fine cocks,  
possibly a honey dun, but the safest way would be to work entirely  
by Mendel's law. By using only the desired characteristics one should  
be able to produce perfect hackles of the rarest shades in duns, honey  
duns, etc. The blue Andalusian is a cross between the black and the  
white Andalusian, half grey-blue, quarter black, quarter pure white in  
the broods in first cross. Tie a few spent gnats or spinners on "Model  
Perfect" hooks and you will see results of great twist. For dry flies hook  
would be good without—balance better. The "Model Perfect" reputa-  
tion rests on quality, barb and point, not bait-hook twist.

[The hackles Mr. Gordon sends are very nice, but I thought he  
discarded Rhode Island Reds because when wet the hackle points have  
a tendency to curl—much less after being oiled, I find. I have tried  
once or twice to run some pens of fowls for fly-tying, but it did not  
answer. I am trying some now in the country—the first blow was that  
a lovely young cock went and died of apoplexy or fighting. If "Pheas-  
ant Tail" can put me on to a sitting of brassy-blue Wyandottes, I  
would like to try them. We ought to get up a "Society for the En-  
couragement of Fowls for Fly-tying." I asked a breeder once if he could  
help us to get birds with the hackles we wanted for fly-tying. He  
looked aghast, and said, "If they are prolific layers and cut up into  
plump wing portions, we might help!"—R. B. M.]



## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

### AMERICAN NOTES: FOWLS, HACKLES, INSECTS, ETC.

F. G.      WHEN I FIRST SAW the Rhode Island Red poultry  
MAY 10, 1913      I fancied here we had a bird that would supply any  
quantity of rich dark-red hackles. A friend of mine has  
a chicken ranch and many fine appearing big cocks. I at once secured  
a supply of feathers, and worked out a big caddis fly composed of  
nothing else—that is, wings from one of the hens, body a strip of  
quill, and cock hackles as legs. Then I dropped a fly in water, and the  
hackles curled up like round-bend fish-hooks. Rhode Island Reds are  
very large, and belong, we believe, to the Asiatics, which have played  
such an important part in ruining our poultry from the fly-maker's  
point of view. They seem to be a lazy bird, and are sometimes hard to  
fatten for the market. Dark-red hackles are usually rather common,  
and those from small cocks are far better as regards shape and size, as  
well as quality. The better the breed the better the hackles. My great  
difficulty has been to find light-coloured ginger, buff and dun hackles.  
How many natural flies have dark-red legs? A bright light-red is the  
better in hackles. The Plymouth Rock has been mentioned as useless  
for hackles, but this is far from being the case, as the best are bright  
and well shaped, and between the light and dark breeds many finely  
barred feathers may be found for wings and legs.\* The lighter shades  
dye well, and a very killing fly can be made after the style of the  
Francis. It requires four dark-barred hackle points for wings and two  
for legs if used as a floating bug. This has been copied abroad.  
H. R. Francis gave me the tip to tie a starling-winged Coachman,  
although I already knew that Uncle Thad Norris was fond of this fly  
with wings of four shades, from white to dark-lead colour. His favour-  
ite evening fly was a ginger hackle, with yellow body, and I have known  
the same fly to be used successfully as a floater. At least fifty years ago  
Ronalds' patterns were worked out with the feathers of American  
birds by a New York fly-fisher, but did not come into general use. Our  
insects differ in many ways from the English, yet one can find those  
that are very nearly the same in size and colour. An English fly made

\* [Mr. Theodore Gordon ties a nailing good fly. He sent me a May Fly dressed  
apparently with Plymouth Rock feather for wings and legs. It would kill well, I am  
sure.—R. B. M.]



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in imitation of one species may answer for another in America. If some of the American trout streams that have their sources in great limestone springs had been preserved and stocked with *Salmo fario* similar fishing to that of the chalk streams might be had. In fact, I used to enjoy much the same sort in free water, except that the native trout of those waters ran from  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb to  $\frac{3}{4}$  lb., with occasionally a really large fish up to 2 lb. These waters at that time were alive with food for trout, and your brown trout would have thrived amazingly. It was delightful on a hot day to slip quietly along in the shade of great willow trees, wading out just far enough to cast with ease. A few fish would be found on the rise any time of day, and in the evening the slow-flowing water would be alive with trout feeding upon small insects, usually ephemeridæ. Big flies are of no use on such streams, except possibly the first of the season, when the trout are unsophisticated.

It seems to me that one of those extraordinarily resilient rods that are now built for dry-fly fishing excite and madden the trout of respectable size. They charge about in such a desperate manner, and resist to the very last. One often discovers that his captive is much smaller than he had supposed, and is bitterly disappointed when his big trout proves to be a very ordinary one.

### THE "MODEL PERFECT" HOOK IN AMERICA

Being pretty well satisfied that many of the flies in use were too large for low water, we made a thorough study of small hooks for dry flies—all from the best manufacturers, and of all bends, short and long. We fancied that there would be a general tendency among the best anglers to use the same hooks, but there is great diversity of opinion. With many strength is the great requisite; they prefer a hook that will endure knocking about, and when one is broken by a low or careless back-cast they invariably blame the hooks and not themselves. Strong salmon hooks may be broken in this way, as the fly at the end of the cast is moving with great velocity, and if it touches a stone, gravel bar, or tree it is sure to go at the bend. A fine-wired hook is

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certainly an advantage when the water is low and trout very shy, as it may be lightly dressed, and a few turns of one good hackle will float it beautifully. Some of the flies now sold have as many legs as a tooth-brush has fibers of bristle, and almost as stiff. The "Model Perfect" hooks are of fine quality, with splendid points and barbs, but the twist is exaggerated and turned so that these needle-points jab into one's thumb! For dry flies they would balance better and look quite as well without twist. I have tried wide bends without sneck, and they hooked well.

Henry P. Wells said long ago that the best fish-hook was a compromise, and he was a practical observer, not fanciful.

In dyeing feathers and other materials a little information from an artist on the mixing of colours may not come amiss. For instance, I am informed that to dye bluish grey one should mix yellow and blue until green is produced, then add red carefully, until one gets the dun tint required. Alum or soda is used in removing grease, and vinegar or acid to set the colour.

The hackles on a favourite fly of mine were imitated in this way. Some very successful patterns are not exact in detail, but in combination the materials give the effect desired when the fly is on the water. The numerous legs used on a floating fly have an effect upon the colour of the body.

Fly-fishing is more interesting when insects are plentiful than when they are scarce, particularly when the attention of the trout seems to be centred upon a particular fly. One cannot make positive assertions or dogmatise in regard to these matters, but I have known sport to fail at the time of the take, when the trout were rising everywhere, for want of a good imitation. Upon supplying this, one would succeed in at least moving the majority of the feeding fish. In some localities big trout have a way of leaping at large flies of all sorts that is very tantalising. Anything that flutters or flies near the surface of the water seems to excite them; and an old friend of mine imitated a lot of small dragon-flies that were plentiful on a brown trout pond. These *looked* well, but how imitate the actions of the natural flies?

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The best days on such waters are when small flies are hatching and are abundant on the water.

A remarkable insect was plentiful on some of the large streams last June. I had seen very few in years past, and presumed that it originated on land. This proved to be an error, as the females dropped their eggs in the water. I now think that the larval period is passed in the water until the insect crawls out and pupates in the ground. The flies are large and dark, with peculiar markings on wings, and were very active and conspicuous. They certainly aroused the large trout, but I doubt if they are annuals, at least in numbers.

I would like to try my imitations of this big fly. Hooks too large are often as unsatisfactory as hooks too small, as by reducing the size of the fly and giving a little more time one will do much better, and hook fish securely; the creel will be heavier. Men accustomed to wet-fly fishing and quick striking may find it advisable to give a little time when fishing with the floating fly, particularly if the trout are rising quietly. When they savage the fly one may strike at once. In dry-fly fishing the wings are much less important than the colour of the body and legs, but they should harmonise with the fly, unless something very conspicuous is required on a full water early in the season or when the stream is discoloured after rain. The earliest flies I have seen on the water were large black gnats and dun-coloured insects in the sub-imago stage (ephemeridæ); also a brown-winged fly, somewhat similar in coloration to an English Cowdung, and a larger brownish dun, both ephemera. However, in the early part of the season the trout in mountain rivers will often take a big fly resembling nothing in particular when not a rise is to be seen. A passable imitation of the stone fly may kill, or a silver-bodied dun, or even the most conspicuous fly in your book (or box). One year a big Blue Bumble or Palmer hackle killed a number of large trout.

As the water warms up a little more small insects are seen, and the fish take them freely. Usually the rise comes on between twelve o'clock and 3 p.m. at this time in May, but this does not mean that nothing can be done earlier or later, yet it is the cream of the day.

A good many anglers turn to bait of one sort or another when the

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trout are not rising freely, but in the long run the fly-fisher pure and simple derives the most enjoyment from the sport. He seems always to be learning something new, and as the years pass gains confidence in his feathered imitations. Everyone knows that the trout he brings in have been killed in the fairest manner possible with artificial flies, and there is an element of satisfaction in this. He believes that only the young fisherman, or those whose opportunities have been restricted, or who have taken to angling late in life, should use bait. There are too many fishermen on our free waters nowadays, he thinks, for every man to kill all the trout he can in every way possible. This angler finds much pleasure in selecting his flies, and is particular in regard to the dressing of each pattern. He knows that a few duns, browns, and yellows, and a few typical flies usually answer all through the season; but there are two or three special "bugs" in which he has great faith and tries first on every stream he fishes.

At this season (mid-winter) men in all parts of the country—in fact, all over the northern world—begin to have "the fever," as they call it. They think and dream of the spring-like days that are coming; of the rushing waters, the swelling buds that cover the woodlands with a tender haze of green, of the songs of birds at break of day, and the wonderfully sweet, crisp air. But most of all they dream of the trout and of fly-fishing. For three long months as the fever rises they enjoy the pleasures of anticipation to an extent hardly possible to the devotees of any other sport. All their hopes and expectations may not be realised; they may have but a few days on the well-beloved streams, but come what will they have been blessed, and will have something delightful to remember.

### A NOTE FROM AMERICA

F. G.      THE SEASON IS at least two weeks early over here.  
MAY 17, 1913      In Pennsylvania there was good fly-fishing during the  
last half of April, and May has come in with the  
warmth of June. Trout are in fine condition and have fed freely, but  
if warm, dry weather continues, the period of easy fishing will be com-

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paratively short. I cannot remember an evening rise as early as May 3 in previous years in this region. Wet-fly men have had a good time, as many trout were in rapid broken water. There has been a miscellaneous assortment of insects hatching. On May 2 a pale, delicate perilidae and a lovely little spinner sat on my hand together. But the former was restless, and the latter flew to my ear. Trout were rising freely after eleven o'clock on May 1, the opening day in New York, but now the heat is so great that they feed better early and late. These conditions are unusual, and I am afraid will induce bait and minnow fishing. Floods have spoiled much fine dry-fly water on some of the streams in this section. Down river there are some immense pools, but the water is shallower and faster than it was a few years ago. If there is a fair rise of fly and the trout drop down in these pools to feed, one finds excellent conditions for the floating fly, but the fish were lying in the necks of these pools, very few rises were spotted, and trout were hard to locate. They certainly fought well when they did rise, but they were not much interested until a lot of fly came up just before dusk.

[Mr. Gordon sends me a bit of dark condor quill stripped, and says: "Dark condor for, say, Blue Upright, Iron Blue or Grey Quill. Have only tried Blue Upright." It makes a nice dark quill body. Has Mr. Gordon tried celluloid? Mr. Percy Wadham, of the Dreadnought Reel Company, Newport, Isle of Wight, is an expert in celluloid, and he now makes it so that, in my opinion, it is better than any quill or silk; he makes it as fine as peacock quill and in every colour; also in larger sizes for sea-trout and salmon flies. His celluloid tinsels are really wonderful, and do not tarnish, very light, easy to work, and imperishable, in all the colours of the rainbow.—R. B. M.]

## TROUT SEASON

F. S. "GATHER YE ROSES while ye may, for time is still  
MAY 17, 1913 a-flying."  
May has come in with a burst of heat, which if continued will shorten the period of best fishing for trout this season. The trout are in fine condition and fed freely from about 11 A. M. on the 1st of May, but each day is warmer, and there was a short rise at

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dusk last night; very unusual for early May. In the afternoon it was so warm that the fish were lazy and indifferent, but put up a good fight if they could be persuaded to rise. The streams have become so rapid of late years that at times the wet fly is very killing in good hands early in the season.

If I dared to forecast the weather I would advise anglers who can do so to visit their beloved streams as early as possible.

At the moment, indications point to dry, sunny days and falling waters. You remember the protracted heat in May two years ago, followed by rain and cool weather after the 9th of June? The flies out have been varied in size and color and of several species—ephemeridæ, perlidæ, caddis, etc., and I have not seen a really good rise, yet I know that there has been such for a short time. Of course, I speak only from observations confined to a few hours each day. If the trout flop at the floating fly or are not well hooked, try reducing the size. If one finds rising trout and they refuse or do not notice the fly on the cast, it may pay to spend a little time getting the color of the natural. To me this is most interesting and amusing. I spent two hours over half a dozen trout that were rising occasionally on Friday, and at last caught four of them. One wants only a few fish if he is near a stream. It is only on short trips that the angler wishes to kill a basket of trout.

## GLYCERINE AS A GUT IMPROVER AND PRESERVER

F. G. [A REMARK in a note I had from Mr. Theodore  
MAY 24, 1913 Gordon this week about brittle gut—"hard old gut," as  
he calls it—reminds me that I have long intended to  
give anglers what I believe is a very useful tip for improving and pre-  
serving gut. But let me first give our American friend's note, as it em-  
phasises the point I want to make.—R. B. M.]

Went a-maying recently in the hope of finding the residence of one or two really big trout. Fortunately, the bending rod, when playing a pounder, in rather fast water, attracted the attention of a man I know, and he came down for a chat. He kindly showed me where a large trout lay, and I worked hard to raise that fish. Very rapid water on my side, a swirling eddy across under precipitous bank—miserable

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place for the floating fly. At last I crawled up and tried the half-drift with a larger fly. I hated to be so close, but it seemed the only way. Presently a great fish rose in the clear water, taking the fly on the edge of the current. I did not strike, there was no jerk, yet his weight in turning down snapped the gut at the first knot. It was hard old gut, but I had none better. It is a beautiful sight to see a heavy trout rise in this way. So easy is the movement that it seems slow, but is really quite rapid.

I heard of another trout, said to be big, but on landing it proved to be only 16 in. I was content with four good trout. If I could only have had a fight with the big chap! There is no knowing what he would have done. Lots of room for a battle.

[Here we have the big fellow lost because of the use by the angler of "hard old gut"—that is, gut which has got brittle. Is there any way of making brittle gut reliable?

In his book, "Fishing Tackle: its Materials and Manufacture," published by Messrs. Ward, Lock and Co. in 1886, the late Mr. J. H. Keene says, page 48:—

"And here, as it will not be out of place in this chapter, let me give an item of information which is worth a great deal to every fly and other fisherman. Every one has suffered from the extreme brittleness of gut, especially in hot weather. Soak it, therefore, in glycerine for twenty-four hours; *it will never get hard if this be done occasionally*. And glycerine is a strong preservative of animal fibre. The felt pads of a fly-book, thoroughly wetted with glycerine, will keep so without change for years, and also keep the gut with unimpaired flexibility and strength for years." Mr. Keene adds: "Try it, O ye sapient fly-fishers—and don't forget where you got the wrinkle from!"

I am afraid Mr. Keene often forgot where he got his wrinkle from. On the page opposite to this hint about glycerine he has copied, without a word of acknowledgment, illustrations which I drew myself and published in the *Fishing Gazette*.

This glycerine tip for preserving gut which Mr. Keene thus recommends and claims to have discovered was very strongly endorsed in a letter I had from Mr. Aspinall, of Bolton, Lancs, some time back, in which he speaks very strongly of the advantages of using glycerine on

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silkworm gut. Unless I am mistaken, Mr. Aspinall even went so far as to say that by soaking gut which had apparently lost its strength in glycerine it would renew its youth—rejuvenatae it. Mr. Aspinall is a practical and analytical chemist, and what he said made me feel much more impressed with what Mr. Keene said twenty-seven years ago. I am not a chemist, and I had looked on Mr. Keene's statement that "glycerine is a strong preservative of animal fibre" with suspicion, because I remember many years ago trying glycerine as a preservative for small fish for pike and trout baits, and found they became after a time so soft and flabby as to be useless. Since formalin came into use I have thought of trying a mixture of formalin and glycerine, to see if they would preserve better in combination than separately, as formalin makes baits in time as much too hard as glycerine makes them too soft. But I have not yet tried. As a matter of fact, I never use preserved bait if I can get fresh dace or minnows.—R. B. M.]

## THE DRY-FLY MAN'S HANDBOOK

F. S.        THE PUBLICATION of a book fresh from the  
MAY 31, 1913 hand of F. N. Halford is always an event in the angling  
world in America and France (already translated), as  
well as in England, and into this latest work has been condensed all  
the knowledge and experience gained in forty years upon the chalk  
streams of the South of England. American fly-fishers began to read  
"Floating Flies" and "Dry Fly Fishing in Theory and Practice" more  
than twenty years ago, and their attention was directed to the use of  
floating flies upon their own waters. They soon learned to adapt Eng-  
lish methods to the conditions as found in various portions of the  
United States. Mountain rivers of rapid descent differ widely from the  
placid chalk streams, but there are many streams in this country  
where somewhat similar conditions may be found. In this "Hand-  
book" Mr. Halford has called to his assistance three experts to demon-  
strate the fine sport that may be had in lake, loch and reservoir fishing  
for large trout with the dry fly. Of these the article by John Hender-  
son on the "Dry Fly on Loch Arrow" in Ireland is probably most in-  
structive and thorough, as this gentleman has spent ten years in work-



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ing out methods and flies for taking the splendid trout (of from three to eight pounds) which formerly were supposed to rise only during the mayfly season and to the natural insects, fished with a "blow line" of floss silk, which was wafted out by the breeze and gently dapped upon the water. (By the way, the new Shokan dam, in the Catskills, will afford the finest trout fishing in America, if properly treated, and not spoiled by the introduction of other predatory fish. It will be stocked naturally from the Esopus with the rainbow and European trout of good size and quality.)

As the number of dry-fly men has increased, the fishing upon the best streams in England has become more and more a cult, almost a profession, and the value of good water has increased enormously. There are purists and ultra-purists, and the latter will never, never cast an artificial fly until after they have seen a real insect taken by a trout. They may remain all day in contemplation of the clear, flowing stream, often with the aid of a pair of binoculars, but unless there is a rise or "hatch" of ephemeridæ, caddis flies or diptera, the fly rod remains idle, spiked in the ground. Many English rods have a spike in the butt to hold the rod upright when changing flies, and to save it from being trampled upon.

In the chapter upon "The Ethics of the Dry Fly," Mr. Halford is very severe in his treatment of all those anglers who are not purists. He objects most decidedly to the use of wet flies and downstream fishing, upon dry-fly waters, and gives quite a long list of "Don'ts."

Do not hammer a trout; that is, do not cast again and again over the same trout, as it may make it shy.

Do not fish after it is too dark to see the fly.

Do not wade the shallows. It makes the trout shy.

Do not use wet flies or large glittering lures. Take heed of the example supplied by purists and ultra-purists and imitate them in all things.

Of recent years a school of anglers has sprung up in England who are experts with the dry fly, yet not entirely wedded to it. When trout are feeding upon nymphs coming up to hatch upon the surface, "bulging" it is called, or "tailing"; that is, rooting in weeds or shallows for larvæ, shrimps and snails, these men imitate the nymph or larva and

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

cast upstream to these feeding fish which are usually difficult to catch. The flies they use are certainly wet, but many fishermen consider it fine sport, as this method enables them to take a few good trout on days when the dry fly is useless. As one of these masters of the wet and dry fly remarks, "I should always instinctively fish the dry [fly] if my intelligence did not often tell me that the wet is the sounder method at the moment." This point of view will be approved by many American anglers, but we quite understand Mr. Halford's position and opinions formed upon waters which command a high rental, and which are stocked, nursed into fine condition, and protected in order that they may afford the best of fishing for large trout and the very best sport with the dry fly only.

In our own experience in America we have frequently continued to fish the floating fly when we knew positively that a couple of wet flies cast upstream would prove more remunerative. One loves to see the tiny fly dancing with its little wings "cocked" as it floats toward us. The rise is more plainly to be seen and nothing in the world of sport is more fascinating than to cast to large trout that can be seen, or which are rising at natural water-bred insects. We have fished streams in this country where the trout were as shy and stalking them as necessary as anywhere in the world. Also one had to exercise the same care in the presentation of the counterfeit fly delicately and accurately as one would upon a chalk stream where all bait-casting is barred. No angler can read the Halford series without pleasure and profit. There is much information in regard to making and maintaining a "Fishery." Many of our best streams could maintain a much greater head of trout than at present. The deterioration and damage by floods could be greatly lessened and breaks put upon the violence of the streams of rapid descent. We have been talking gravel and Portland cement, or



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reinforced concrete for several years, and Mr. Halford gives an instance of successful use of the former in old bags.

There is much valuable information in regard to insects. We have a greater variety and many more large flies in this country, but that was to be expected. Careful instruction in casting in the English style with most useful instantaneous photographs illustrating the various methods is given; in fact, this "Handbook" is a handbook, and there is no doubt that this work will (as Mr. Halford expects) live after the death of the author and perpetuate his memory.

### SENSATIONAL DRY FLY IN NOVA SCOTIA

F. S.        A WAY BACK in 1912 I wrote to Dr. Edward Breck  
JUNE 21, 1913    to the effect that if he would send me a few of his  
Nova Scotia mayflies in a weak solution of formalin,  
I would try to imitate them to the best of my ability. This offer was  
made in good faith, but Dr. Breck has probably not realized that it  
meant the expenditure of considerable labor and pains.

It might be necessary to test the flies and correct the coloration  
from life, but once the pattern is found to kill well, good fly-makers  
can be found to duplicate it.

Dr. Breck's writings are always interesting, and his experience  
has been great, but in this instance he has a theory that the dry fly  
is no use in Nova Scotia. Given the natural flies and the trout taking  
them freely and the whole question resolves itself into a good imita-  
tion presented in a natural way. I have had his experience on many  
streams where there was a really heavy rise of the species of natural  
fly day after day. Men would complain that before the rise they were  
having sport; after the flies appeared they had poor success. Invariably,  
so far as my experience goes, it was necessary only to offer a really  
good imitation in size and color. One might have to dress half a dozen  
before one could please the trout. Again a rather poor copy would  
kill if the trout were strong on the feed.

The conditions described by Dr. Breck are first those which in-  
terest the lover of the floating fly. They call upon him to do his  
darndest to succeed. I am no purist or ultra purist, and fish wet when

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I feel inclined that way, but the more one fishes the greater his enjoyment when problems of this kind present themselves. The Perlidæ, caddis flies, etc., flutter and buzz, but the ephemeridæ usually sail down serenely after coming out of the nymphal stage. Nowadays they are not so plentiful as they were ten years ago, but we had good rises nearly every day during that nasty weather in May.

I have been ill and am even more stupid in expressing myself than usual. I willingly admit that conditions vary greatly in different waters, but given the flies in the water and trout feeding upon them, I feel confident that the persevering dry-fly man will succeed not only in taking fish, but some of the very largest, provided that they are rising steadily. No doubt there is a very great deal in the manner in which the artificial fly is presented. The best of our artificials are far from perfect, but if one can get the effect of the natural fly in the water, he usually has sport. One gets a pretty good pattern occasionally at the first attempt, but more frequently improvements are required. I have fussed with a bug for two seasons before I felt satisfied that I could do no better.

It is not necessary to go to Nova Scotia to have Dr. Breck's delightful experience. I have had the same in New York and Pennsylvania, and at least once in Maine. It is a beautiful problem and well worth a little study and effort.

If Dr. Breck wishes to fish the dry fly from a canoe, he must either handle the canoe himself or have a man who understands what he is trying to do. Why use an orange leader?

It is far more difficult to fish quiet water than where the surface is ruffled or rippled by breeze or currents. With a strong bias against the floating fly in the United States, I doubt if it would be worth while to work hard on imitations.

### DRY FLY IN NOVA SCOTIA

[The following was written by Mr. Edward Breck, in reply to Gordon's criticism of him in the June 21 issue of F. & S.—Ed.]

I was delighted to read the column by Theodore Gordon on the above subject, for next to receiving a letter from that gentleman the

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greatest honor is to be "pitched into" by him. Both these privileges are now mine, for he speaks truth when he says that he wrote me, offering to reproduce our bluenose mayflies if I would send him specimens. Better than that, he inclosed in his letter one of the most exquisitely tied artificial flies that I have ever seen; one that I carried about in my pocket book all winter and showed to every angling acquaintance of mine whom I considered worthy of feasting his eyes on such beauty. Well and good, but now for my *apologia*.

Did Mr. Gordon expect me to send him mayflies before May? Aha! Well, those mayflies were duly collected, one of them on that very day when I captured the perch(!), and they are now reposing in a box before me. Why? Because, Mr. Editor, you have failed to answer my letter about these very flies! I see you writhe and quiver with humiliation, and well you may. I told you of my promise to Mr. Gordon, and inquired whether you agreed in your capacity of curator of the new dry-fly entomological collection, to let me send these to him for classification and imitation. And now this reproach from the Walton of the Neversink! It is too, too much! However, I wash my hands of you; you may stew in your own editorial juice and be darned to you! The least you can do is to take post and go up to Sullivan County and apologize personally to the Sage.

And now one for Mr. Gordon. He shall not think I assert that "the dry fly is of no use in Nova Scotia." I relate only my repeated experiences with it. I have not closed the chapter, and perhaps at another season, say in mid-summer, it may prove successful.

Mr. Gordon suggests my handling my canoe myself when fishing dry-fly. The suggestion makes me wonder whether he knows as much about canoeing as about the "gentle art of killing fish." I have done that over and over again, but I prefer a good man to paddle me. "Or to have a man who understands what he is trying to do," quotha! Why, dear Mr. Gordon, the "man behind" this spring was no less a person than Charles the Strong, he of the "Tent Dwellers," who is, in my opinion, the best fishing guide in Nova Scotia. This does not mean that Charles has dry-fly experience to speak of, but he has been out repeatedly with me when we have tried it, and he thoroughly understands its principles. As for placing a canoe where I tell him, and

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holding it there in any kind or condition of water, commend me to Charles Charlton. There's only one thing to be said: Mr. Gordon is due at my camp next spring, or any other time, so far as that is concerned.

Why use an orange leader? Well, firstly because a man named Orr (I think) sent me one of that shade that was the nicest looking thing of the kind I ever saw on this side the Atlantic. As our waters here are mostly brownish in hue, I found that it was difficult even for me to see the leader, and though the scientists are still disputing about the way the trout sees things (see the late London *Field*), I believe that this pale orange leader is as invisible as a mist color, or white, and probably more so (excuse the bull). I have had the greatest difficulty in buying leaders here that were not equal to salmon, and I use only the most delicate. Hence when Mr. Orr sent me these I rejoiced. I found them light, strong and finely tapered. His color theories may be wrong, but I found this one right.

And meanwhile, Mr. Editor, the four dried mayflies (for I lost my formaline) are waiting for Mr. Gordon.]

## IN DEFENSE OF THE BAIT FISHERMAN

[The following note by Mr. Talbot Denmead was apparently written in answer to Gordon's strictures against bait. It was later the subject of a riposte by Gordon.—Ed.]

With abject apologies to the dry-fly fisherman, I wish to state that bait fishing for brook trout is a science.

Because said dry-fly fisherman can take a foreign fraud and a four-ounce rod and fish upstream and take a goodly trout, there is no reason why he should put himself on a pedestal and look down upon his more lowly brother of the wet-fly or the garden hackle, who is less expert perhaps, but who loves the mountain streams and the speckled beauties just as much as the dry-fly artist. It really is not nice of him to be so uncharitable to his brother angler.

Mind, I am not saying a word against the dry-or wet-fly fisherman, or that his way is not the right way or maybe the best way, but the angler for brook trout with light tackle and bait should not un-

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ceremoniously be cast with the pot fisher, the fish hog and other such swine; there must be some middle ground where the man with the bait can fish in peace and not have some one always stepping on his toes. I am not a bait-fisherman for trout altogether, having caught them with fly as well as with bait, but I have found there are certain streams, generally very small ones, which contain deep holes running under roots and into deep banks and around stumps and logs where it is absolutely impossible to catch a trout on a fly for the very simple reason that fish cannot see through a solid substance, and a fly on the surface of the water outside of his lair might just as well be in Simple Simon's Mother's pail for all the good it will do. Of course, the dyed-in-the-wool dry-fly expert will say wait until he comes out. Very nice, but he rarely comes out until some one sends a nice juicy worm bouncing along the bottom where Sir Fontinalis can at least get a look at it.

Then when he does come out of said dark and covered hole after the aforesaid tempting morsel, have you got him? No sir! It is one trick to coax him out, another trick to hook him without tangling your whole outfit in the overgrowth, another to keep him from taking a turn around some projecting snag, and a few more to get him out on the high bank, where you can get your hands on him, or sit on him if you like—anything to prevent him from jumping off the hook and gracefully balancing himself on the end of his tail and projecting himself back into the water. Oh! it is a science all right—if you get any fish. I can show Mr. Dry-Fly Man a dear little babbling brook not far from civilization where there are a few fat fish left, but he won't hurt them. He will come out of that jungle minus his tackle and his religion, if he has any, but no fish.

I hear some one in the amen corner say, "But it is not all of fishing to fish." Very true that is why so many of the fraternity go after tadpoles instead of trout—perhaps. Personally I like to see a fish or two with speckles on their sides when I go after trout; I want them over eight inches long from tip to tip; I want to catch them on light tackle; I don't want them all, but would leave some for the other fellow. If I really did not want to catch a trout or two I would not go and neither would you.

Remember, I am not criticising the fly fishermen, but I simply

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

want to say a word in behalf of some very good sportsmen who have been accused of taking an unfair advantage of one of the greatest fish the world produces by using the fish's natural food—men who would not take an unfair advantage of a comrade, who would stand aside and let said comrade fish the most likely hole, or take the shot over the standing dog, and whose tackle box is always open to the fisherman “up a tree.”

Please do not consign these men to the Fishermen's Purgatory. We do not ask for love, but for goodness' sake be charitable. Do you get me?

Remember, the Immortal Izaak was a bait fisher. “Nay, good scholar; I caught my last trout with a worm; now I will put on a minnow.”]

### BONNIE BROOK

#### A REPLY TO MR. DENMEAD

F. S. MR. DENMEAD'S DEFENSE of bait-fishing, in the last issue of *Forest and Stream*, reminded me of the JULY 5, 1913 brook in which I caught my first trout with a worm. But it was not just a common worm, because I was chaperoned on that memorable afternoon by “Docky” Noble, and he had great faith in scented baits.\*

After digging his baits in the garden, Docky would proceed to the drug store and invest several coppers in a good big bunch of asafetida. The worms were placed in a dirty sock, and in their midst a piece of asafetida, which is very good for nervous people, as well as to attract fish. My family always knew when I had been fishing with Docky, because on my return I perfumed the whole house.

Bonnie Brook was a perfect trout brook, flowing in part through sweet meadows and in part through a swampy woodcock covert, where one or two broods of cock were always bred, and where a few flight birds could usually be found in October. Bonnie Brook had many deep

\* [Gordon told this story before, in F. & S. of March 19, 1910; each version adds something in detail, so I have included both in this collection.—Ed.]



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

holes, and there were great cavities under banks where huge trout lurked. How many these were we never knew, until a miscreant in the disguise of a fishculturist set his nets and secured great numbers of splendid *fontinalis* (native brook trout) from one-half pound to a noble specimen of two and one-half pounds.

We had killed one now and then of one pound or better, but it was difficult to get the worm to work four or five feet under a bank covered with rank grass or overhung with bushes. The water in Bonnie Brook was clear as crystal and ran over either clay or clean bright gravel. It was a fascinating little stream, and the man or woman who named it in the early days of the first settlers knew quite well what he or she was about. It was a favorite haunt of our friend Docky—his 14-foot fly-rod was rather long for such a stream—but he was a dyed-in-the-wool bait-fisher, although he always carried a tangled mass of flies on gut in his pocket book and could cast them lightly with his big rod when he wished. But Docky was a bit lazy and very fond of whiskey, so he found worms on an easy open stream more agreeable to his taste than fly-fishing. He rarely entered the tangle of vegetation in the woodcock covert, but fished the water in the open meadows. I recognize the type of trout stream described by Mr. Denmead, and hope that he does not fish the little brooks in which we put the fingerlings. (We have put out 10,000 recently.) Men and boys do fish these nurseries and kill great numbers of baby trout which are placed there to feed and grow big enough to afford sport in the main stream.

Of late there have been signs of a reaction against the cult of the dry fly. In this country we can do nothing quietly or in moderation, and for about two years the floating fly had a tremendous "boom." It was advertised so much that many people were impressed with the idea that the dry fly was a dead sure thing at any old time anywhere and would always lure big trout, while wet fly and bait-fishers could do nothing at all except sit around and admire. I love the floating fly and fish it often in early spring when I know quite well that I could kill more trout with wet flies properly fished. But the floating fly affords the maximum of sport upon the waters suited to it, and we are not after records or thinking of the cook.

I know the streams described by Mr. Denmead, and quite under-

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

stand that the large trout in them can only be secured by bait-fishing, which requires good and patient work. At one time I used all kinds of baits and flies also, and punished the streams I fished to the best of my ability, but there is one deadly bait which I never used and never mention, as it seemed to madden the trout. A very few fish content me nowadays if they are large enough to afford really exciting sport. I have fished the dry fly for more than twenty years, at first only to trout that I saw rising at natural flies. If one can fish for large trout in sight, sport becomes most exciting, and the next best is a rise which one knows must be a big fish. The greatest good for the largest number is conserved by fly-fishing only, as one can follow many fly-fishers and still have sport. The angler's chances are reduced to a minimum when he is compelled to follow a minnow fisher, who scores the trout and puts them down. Worms are not so injurious and grasshoppers do not interfere much if they are fished by a decent man who has some regard for those who follow him. In a large body of flowing water the trout are less easily alarmed and come on the feed again sooner than in small streams. When a club is formed to fish a bit of leased water, one of the first rules to be adopted is "fly-fishing only," and this is for the good of the stream and the members. One greedy angler might ruin the sport for a dozen men who only had a day or two to spare for fishing.

We do not care for preserved waters unless they are hard fished and hold wild trout. Who cares much for trout that will rise freely at almost any fly and can be taken without effort? . . .

If I needed fish for food I would use bait if it was necessary. As for wet and dry flies, it is, I think, true that there are more dry-fly fishers than really scientific wet-fly men. I know a few of the latter and we have fished together wet versus dry. They are quite equal to taking care of themselves.

Let us be liberal and kind to one another, trying to smother prejudice and cultivating a spirit of peace and good will among the brethren of the angle rod. We can have a good stock of trout in free waters—that are pure and well stocked with food—if we are not too greedy and obey the laws.

A few ultra dry-fly men may assume airs of superiority, but they

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

are mostly good fellows. I have never known one of them to kill too many trout. To be able to meet difficulties successfully, yet stick to the artificial fly in all trout waters, we feel that the American angler should thoroughly understand the dry, the wet and the sunk fly.

### GREAT SPORT

F. G. BRAINS COUNT in fishing, and if you add perseverance, the combination is bound to win out. There is a lake up here that is known to contain lake trout, and there were reports of enormous rainbows, and talk of "Rocky Mountain" trout. One man had taken a few of the lake trout trolling—one or two each season for many years—but most of the fishermen soon tired and became discouraged. Last week the lake was attacked by a first-rate angler (an ex-soldier of the United States), who was particularly anxious to land one of those alleged rainbow trout over 2 ft. long. He trolled with spoons, spinners, and minnows, and still fished in deep water, and succeeded in killing three of the lake trout, 4 lb. to 8 lb. in weight. Splendid fish, fat and heavy, but no other trout. At last he put up a big fly of his own manufacture, and fished it well below the surface—and what do you think he got? Four magnificent *fontinalis* (native brook trout), weighing 21 lb., largest 6¼ lb. The most beautiful fish, small, neat heads and great fat bodies; three females and one male. All were taken in one place, where cold springs bubbled up from the bottom of the lake. Such a take in one afternoon and one morning, right here in Sullivan County, near New York! It would be a big thing in Maine or on the Nipigon.



## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

### THE GOLDEN-WINGED WOODPECKER

F. G.        THESE BIRDS ARE protected by law at all seasons.  
JULY 19, 1913    This one was killed by flying against a telephone wire  
                     (probably a bird of the year), and picked up by a lady  
who saved these feathers for me. The quill of this bird is usually a  
clear, very pale yellow, and makes a lovely yellow-bodied Mayfly, but  
most of these are *stained*; only one or two good. Of course, one could  
make very few, anyhow. The bird is the golden-winged woodpecker, a  
large and very handsome member of this family.

[I am greatly obliged to Mr. Gordon, especially as I have been trying  
to get just the particular yellow of some of the quill sent, to see if  
Mr. Wadham can match it for Mayfly and for Sedge bodies.  
—R. B. M.]

The striped bass of the American coast is one of the finest game  
and food fishes in the world. On the same tackle he makes longer runs  
and fights as well as the Atlantic salmon. Large striped bass were at  
one time fished for at the Falls of the Potomac with large flies. I have  
killed them with Bumblepuppy flies. I sent you patterns years ago.

### LARGE TROUT

F. S.        LAST MAY I met an angler from Ellenville, N. Y.,  
JULY 19, 1913    John H. Divine, who was then fishing the Neversink,  
                     with fair success. He told me that last season (1912)  
he killed a trout in the Lackawack stream that was twenty-three  
inches long and weighed over four pounds. On the evening of June 28  
last, Mr. Divine caught a much larger fish. This was a real "sock-  
dollager" for the fly-fisher, although larger ones have been taken on  
bait.

This fine specimen was twenty-seven inches long and weighed six  
pounds three ounces; not a stout fish and probably a male. Last  
season I sent *Forest and Stream* particulars of an eight and one-quarter  
pound trout caught on worm bait in a small stream in the Cats-  
kills. Mr. Divine thinks well of a dark gray hackled fly with red tail for

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

**big trout** early in the season or for evening fishing. It requires patience as well as skill to kill these big trout on the fly.

### ROUGH NOTES ON FISHING

F. S.  
AUGUST 23,  
1913

THE PROLONGED DROUTHS and high temperatures, which have been so common during recent summers, have not been favorable to fly-fishing for trout, but the great army of anglers is constantly growing, and a large proportion seek their pleasure in fresh water rather than in salt. Therefore, it might be well to take stock of all opportunities that present themselves and consider what may be done without great expenditure of time or money near home. We wish to catch fish, always have yearned to do so, ever since we can remember, and even chubs and "sunnies" are better than nothing.

As a matter of fact there is no lack of good fish, if one knows where to find them, and uses his brains in their pursuit. Even the fly-fisher may find sport with other fish than trout. In looking over the field one sees that there are many opportunities for sport which have been neglected. Wherever we have traveled in the States east of the Mississippi River, we have found fishing that was worth while. For the most part we have carried only a fly-rod with its tackle, and were not prepared for bait-fishing, yet we have had sport in localities where we least expected it.

At a health resort in Michigan we stumbled upon excellent black bass, pike and pickerel fishing, and crossing the lake to Wisconsin we found innumerable lakes and streams well stocked with game fish. One is astonished when one realizes how much sport is to be had within a few hours by rail of New York city in streams and lakes which we have ignored, or of which we have had a poor opinion. We believe that all predatory fish will take an artificial fly, if it is the right sort and properly presented, and where large game fish can be killed on fly tackle better sport is had than by any other method. But we have bait-fishing near at hand which requires skill and patience and is very exciting at times. We have a poor opinion of the carp, which is regarded

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

in many places as a nuisance and pest, yet this fish, which thrives everywhere and attains to great size, may afford interesting sport.

It is a powerful fish and when large requires quiet and careful fishing. It has the reputation abroad of caution and wisdom, and we can guarantee a big fight to any man who succeeds in hooking a large carp on reasonably fine tackle. His rushes and charges are long and full of vim, and he requires good handling from the fisherman. The baits are bread, dough, small boiled potatoes, green peas and worms, and some sort of ground bait is usually required to get carp to feed well. We have used small pellets of dough with success, flipping them in all about the baited hook. Carp weighing as much as thirty pounds have been killed on the rod, and where game fish are scarce, the angler may do worse than devote a little attention to these fish. Where trout are not to be had, the fly-fisher may have sport with black bass of both kinds, pickerel, pike, striped bass, bream, perch, sunfish, Delaware chub, etc. In Florida a bewildering variety of fish may be killed on large gaudy flies. One angler gave me a list of thirteen species which he had taken on fly in the estuary of one small river, and I have killed quite a variety of fish myself in that State. The Delaware River is one of the most beautiful streams in the country, and is well stocked with black bass. The largest fish are usually killed on bait—"lampers" (young of the lamprey eel), hellgramites, crawfish, frogs, minnows and nightwalkers, but the artificial fly often does well and the short casting rod with "plug" baits is favored by many anglers.

I have the habit of fly-fishing wherever it is possible, and have had good fun with pickerel in small lakes where the local methods seemed dull and uninteresting. With a companion we have taken sixty pickerel in an afternoon on large flies.

If one uses tackle that bears some relation to the size of the fish, sport is enhanced, and surely there is no dearth of pickerel and pike. Nearly all our ponds and lakes hold good fish of some sort. There are lake trout and black bass of both species in small lakes that for years have been neglected by myself, as I presumed that they held only a few pickerel.

There are waters that are so plowed by motor and other boats during the season (July and August) that one's only chance is to fish

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

early or late. We must study these lakes if without a proper guide, locate the deepest water for lake trout, the positions of reefs, shoals and bars, also find out if we can if any cool springs rise anywhere at the bottom. In fly-fishing for bass we have failed for four days to take a fish, yet after trying out many flies and studying the water, we had fair sport. At that place we failed to raise bass in very deep water, yet in lakes we have occasionally taken the largest fish in twelve to fifteen feet. However, we have had best sport in water less than seven feet deep. Bass often begin to feed as soon as the sun has passed behind the western hills, and at that time we have seen them take small natural flies. They are queer beggars, however, and, like many predatory fish, often rise at the artificial fly merely because it appears to be alive and displays attractive colors. We have known bass to refuse all the best baits known, and then take dead crickets sunk to a considerable depth. Where large fallfish, windfish or chubs are found, sport may be had by taking them on trout tackle and flies. They are in best condition in the autumn and often rise freely. We have killed them up to nineteen and one-half inches, and they grow considerably larger than this. I really believe that bait-fishing for carp is well worth attention where large fish are found, and when suitable tackle is used. They are shy, and it requires patience and experience to be successful, but we are thinking chiefly of the fight a big carp puts up if hooked upon fair tackle.

### AMERICAN NOTES

F. G.  
SEPTEMBER 20,  
1913

THERE WERE REPORTS in the newspapers recently that a carp of over 60 lb. had been caught in the Wallkill River, in Orange County, N. Y.

I know that there are quantities of big carp in that stream, which is sluggish and deep for long distances, but did not think of any carp over 30 lb. to 35 lb. I knew a man who caught one weighing 27 lb. in the Rondout, near the Hudson River, using a small boiled potato as bait; and he assured me that fishermen had killed them over 30 lb. weight.

I have only fished for carp of 6 lb. to 8 lb. with a fly-rod and tackle

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

and dough bait. Would bait the hook with a small pear-shaped piece of kneaded bread, cast out, and place the rod in a forked stick. A few yards of line were pulled off the reel and arranged on the ground to run out easily, without being checked. Then, sitting well back from the water, we would make small pellets of dough, about the size of a pea, and flip them in all about the hook bait. If the carp could be induced to feed, the mud on the bottom would be stirred in narrow lanes, and we knew that it was only a matter of time before a carp would find and suck in the hook. When the bait was taken we would allow the carp to have several yards of line before striking. But when we did strike—man! I tell you there was something doing a charge for somewhere. Those piggy carp, when waked by the prick of a hook, go as if the devil was after them with red-hot poker. (I fancy that it is Neptune who wields a trident, but probably the devil does not poke the fire himself.) The carp is a very powerful fish, and it was really exciting sport; but they have become a nuisance in many parts of the country, having multiplied in quite an extraordinary way. However, I understand that there is now a large market for them in such cities as New York and Philadelphia, at a low price. I have seen barrels full of them, alive in water, yet crowded together, in New York. Carp-fishing for sport is neglected in this country, yet is well worth while, particularly when the bass will not take. The Wallkill is well stocked with black bass as well as carp.

The drought, which began early in June, has been broken only by slight showers, and the trout streams in many States are in a pitiful condition. The tributary brooks are drying up, and even big streams like the Neversink are reduced to trifling proportions.

Many small trout will die, and big ones will be killed by poachers and unsportsmanlike persons, but it is wonderful how many fish manage to pull through. We have had occasional droughts that continued until cold weather; yet when fishing opened the following spring we would find a good stock of trout ready for the fishermen. Nowadays, if one has the good pure water and the food, there is no great difficulty in keeping up a good stock of trout; but the droughts, greedy fishers, and sneaks are a sad nuisance.

How one hates to find a little brook entirely dry, with bunches of tiny dead trout in what has been the deeper portions or bits of pools.



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

The ruffed grouse have had good weather for their broods, which seem full and strong this year. They are often very tame in summer, and only last week an old cock strutted along before me in a narrow wood road, spreading his beautiful tail and looking as big and important as possible. Several birds were near, but they were not so confiding, flushing at twenty yards or more, and departing on thunderous wing. There are one or two families of woodcock now full-grown in the brush near the river; but much of the good feeding ground that formerly existed has been swept away by floods. These birds breed in many localities where they are known to very few persons, and, as a general rule, wherever there are trout you will find a few woodcock (and sometimes a great many). In August years ago I found evidences that an immense number of birds had been reared along a wild stream in Pennsylvania; but they had scattered on the approach of the moulting season. He is not as big as your woodcock, but a very handsome and noble bird. He is not timid like a quail, but will sometimes strut before the dog that is pointing him.

The ephemeridæ are not as plentiful as they were many years ago on these mountain rivers, but there are great rises of the perlidæ and trichoptera, the smaller stone flies and caddis. In imitating these flies for dry-fly fishing the wings do not appear to be of great importance, if one can get the body and legs of the correct colour.

One small greenish-bodied chap was plentiful for weeks in May and June, and the trout appreciated this insect, taking it freely.

During the worst weather, when it was cold and windy, we had good rises of a fine brownish dun ephemeræ, usually after twelve o'clock, and sometimes as late as five o'clock p.m. The pale yellows were in strong force during the fine weather early in May, and later appeared again in good numbers. A few of the big strange insects we called the "Polka Dot" were about, but not enough of them to excite the big trout as they did last year.

But I must not make a list of all the flies that attracted my attention. Several months since there was a fine article in the *Fishing Gazette* on dry-fly fishing on the Dart River in Devon. It was most interesting, and I yearned to send the author a few flies. He said that the

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

flies about in the evening were red spinners, but the imitations of that fly were not taken by the trout. Now this kind of thing always excites me. I wish to try to make something that will kill, and with vain conceit imagine that if I put my mind to the job I might succeed. Often I would send flies to perfect strangers if I knew the size of the hooks used. Anglers are conservative sometimes and will not try anything that has not been vouched for. Last season, near the close, I found that a lot of small red spinners were about, and of two sorts. I tied flies with hackle-point wings, and finding that they killed well sent a few to friends who were fishing only a few miles distant from my diggings. Now they had made some complaint as to not taking big fish, yet they went on with their old standards and never tried one of those flies. They did not fancy the hackle-point wings. Anglers often like to see those rather too substantial feather wings dancing down towards them. The flies are much easier seen, and look prettier, with nice dun wings, dressed double; but, after all, the wings of a floating fly are the least important part of it. You may leave them off entirely, yet kill your rising trout in good style, if the legs and body are all right. First-rate spectacles that would assist one in seeing his own flies and the natural ones as well would be a great boon to the dry-fly man whose sight is not keen and far. I often lose twenty minutes or more of the best hour in the evening because I cannot spot my fly, and do not know where it is.

I was fishing for an old trout before tea, and the sinking sun was directly in my eyes. The fly had floated farther than I thought, and when the fish rose I was very late in striking. This may not have caused the trouble, but I think so. At any rate, there was a grand rush downstream, 40 ft. of line was grabbed off the reel in an instant, and then something very heavy bored about at the bottom of the deepest part of the long pool. The strain on my stiff "Tournament" rod was very great, and I believe that anyone looking on would have said, "That man has hooked an enormous trout."

Gradually I worked the fish across stream into dead water, and at last I realised that my trout was hooked foul. Even then it required the expenditure of some minutes before victory was assured and the quarry was safely in my hands. The hook was fast in the tough skin

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

an inch to the left of the right pectoral fin, and instead of a 4-pounder I had landed a trout of  $1\frac{3}{4}$  lb.

Anyway, it was a bully fight. I know that they formerly killed big pike on the Irish lakes with large gaudy flies, and the difference in the sport between even a small pike or pickerel on fly tackle and one killed on heavy troll is very great. There are so many good fish that may be taken on the fly-rod if it is a stout one of 5 oz. to 8 oz., and if it is backed by a fairly large reel and plenty of line.

We are afraid to say how many sorts of fish we have killed on all kinds of flies, because we always try to take them that way if it is within the bounds of possibility.

Think of hooking a 20 lb. mascallonge (*Esox nobilior*) on stout trout tackle and a real big "Bumble Puppy," with a few inches of wire between the fly and salmon leader or casting line—3 ft. would be enough gut! It would be a battle royal; but I am sure that it could be done if we had a good canocman who knew where to find the fish. It is the large fish, the exciting combats with a worthy antagonist, that makes history worth recording in the life of an angler. A thousand small fish are not remembered, although we may have enjoyed taking them at the time.

Were the first brown trout with which these celebrated streams were stocked from the cyd ova presented by Mr. R. B. Marston to Mr. A. N. Cheney, then Fish Commissioner of New York? Were they Loch Levens, or from German importations? They were exquisite fish in shape and colouring, with golden-yellow bellies and bright pink-red spots. They remained distinct after the darker *fario* became plentiful, and occasionally a big trout of this kind is taken now. They would live in the same pool and hide in the same hole with the ordinary brown trout for months, yet never change. It was no mere difference in coloration caused by local conditions, although this is *white* water, very clear and bright.

Last year we were much attached to hooks for floating flies, while in 1913 fly rods have been more interesting.

I have been thinking of the man who wishes for the best, and will save and plan to get it, but who expects one first-class rod to answer for all fly-fishing. He may go to an expert for advice, and learn what

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

said expert prefers; but that may not mean the rod best suited to *his* individual needs. I have been thinking of something different. Temperament influences most men in the choice of a rod, but the type will be developed by the conditions under which the sport is pursued. I fancy that fishing for rising trout only in a big chalk or limestone stream and working up a big mountain river require different types; also that the man of nervous temperament should have a rod of very quick action, rather firm in the butt and fine in the point. Many anglers do not give their rods time enough. The best makers of split-bamboo or cane rods can give the fly-fisher any desired action if he will tell them what that is. I have tried out many rods of from 3½ oz. to 10 oz., but did not go below the former weight, as I fancy that 4 oz. is the least weight that will make a satisfactory rod for the man who can have but one. If one can afford a battery of rods, it is very nice to have an extremely light, short rod of 2½ oz. to 3 oz. for occasional use, but the favourite type for dry-fly fishing in this country at present seems to be the "Tournament" rod of 9 ft. and 4¾ oz. to 5 oz. Of course there are many anglers who prefer rods of 9½ ft. to 10 ft., and others who are fond of the extreme light weights; but no experienced youth (or man) should begin with one of these beautiful little weapons. He will be very apt to smash it. We remember the lovely little rod we bought when we were very young, and how bitterly we grieved when it was smashed by a 12-in. trout, and vigorous effort to "haul him out." Much older fishermen have broken their delicate rods during the first week of fishing. The English chalk-stream style of 9½ ft. and 8 oz. weight is a pleasant rod to fish. I like the big comfortable cork handle and rubber button. Indeed, I believe that all fly rods are improved by having that rubber button. The rod is beautifully finished, showing careful attention to details, and all the native anglers here would like to have it. It is just a trifle slow in action, from the American point of view. As one grows older, and remembers mistakes that caused disappointment, loss of time and money, he wishes that he could do a little something for the rising generation, and to further the great cause of sport. There are few things in life that give such unalloyed pleasure and real satisfaction as sport with rod and gun, and it is best to begin right if possible. We fear that we are not ultra-purists, or even purists.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

One of the most graceful and successful dry-fly fishers we know often uses two flies on his casting line. He says that it is not ethical, but somehow he began that way long ago, and he likes it. It is a pretty sight to see him place his brace of flies softly in a quiet pool, particularly when he is casting midge "flocs."

We heard of a big trout that lived in a deep pool; he had broken the hook of one minnow fisher, and carried away the casting line of another. We tried many floating flies of sorts and sizes over this fish, and wasted hours while watching for him to rise, but he never showed up. Now, we wished to see that trout; we had heard so much about him that our curiosity was excited, so one afternoon we concocted a very beautiful insect on a long Mayfly hook. It was a compromise between the "lure" and what one might call the "insectivorous," and after partaking of tea that evening we presented it to him with our compliments. Do you know that he was pleased, and accepted this "thing" at the second cast! Well, he did rise promptly, and, in spite of the violation of all the principles of imitation, ethical culture, and all the rest of it, I was extremely pleased to bag that trout. I wrapped him up nicely in heavy paper and bestowed him in the skirts of my old shooting-jacket. What is the use of carrying a big basket when one only goes out for one trout, and has only small hopes of landing it?

### A GOOD WORD FOR OUR BROWN TROUT (S. FARIO) IN AMERICA

F. G.  
OCTOBER 11,  
1913

REFERRING TO YOUR note in regard to Mr. Taylor's experience with brown trout in the *Fishing Gazette* of Sept. 13, 1913, this prejudice against *Salmo fario* was at one time well-nigh universal; no one seemed to have a good word to say for this fine trout. But, mark this, I have heard the same criticism of the rainbow trout from anglers in waters where it was not native, but an introduced species.

I presume that we all have our prejudices in regard to one thing or another, but the brown trout has won its way to a high place in the estimation of many of the best anglers in this country, particu-

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

larly those of varied experience, who have fished a great deal each season during many years. We all love our native *fontinalis*, and would be very glad if we could have a good head of fairly large brook trout in our big streams, but except in a few localities present conditions do not favour this. Long droughts and warm water do not agree with the "little salmon of the fountain." Many of us can remember how poor our sport was before the first of the brown trout came in. There were not many of these, but they were of good size and gave much sport, but they were called "Dutchmen," and were accused of destroying the native trout. It seems the natural tendency of mankind to throw bricks or stones at foreigners.

All trout become sluggish in warm water. I remember the keen disappointment of a lady who had heard much of the wonderful fighting qualities of our American brook trout, and who was extremely anxious to see some of these fish taken upon artificial flies. It was during the month of July, and the weather was very warm, the sun of summer had been blazing day after day upon the many miles of shallow rippling water between the deeper pools, and of course the temperature of the water was away above what should be normal in a trout stream.

However, I knew where we could find a school of native trout in a big pool, into which a little fresh spring water trickled from the rocks. I found a comfortable seat for my fair friend under the trees upon a bank where she could see every movement of fish and fisherman. Then wading in below and casting a long line and very small fly I caught trout after trout. When hooked they were at once led away from the school and towed around to a gently shelving gravel bank. My friend was sadly disappointed. "Why don't they fight?" "I thought that trout always fought so desperately," she said again and again. I explained the matter as well as I was able—that the water was too warm; that they were dull and sluggish; that a cold change in the weather would alter their behaviour, and that a few weeks earlier the same trout would have put up a good fight. I fear, however, that this woman never realised her ideal brook trout, and always remembered the lazy specimens she had seen taken on a hot July day.

Brown trout fight desperately in cool water, and if much fished

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

for are often very crafty, dashing under rocks, logs, or driftwood as soon as they feel the hook. On our large eastern streams the average size of the fish is much larger than in the days when we had only native trout. Much bigger trout are frequently killed. They grow more rapidly and seem able to adapt themselves to the climatic changes of recent years. They endure almost anything. Again and again conditions during the summer and autumn have been so bad that we expected poor fishing the following spring, but when the season opened the brown trout have appeared in strong force, and given good sport to a multitude of anglers. As for swallowing artificial flies, "Small Cowdungs," it is an individual experience, surely. They rise in the same way, are taken on the same flies (wet and dry), and in the same waters that the native trout are taken. Multitudes of the latter have been turned in as fingerlings, others are carried down from the colder upper waters during floods, and we usually kill a good many early in the season while the water is cold, but they are mostly small fish. One could write many pages in defence of both the brown and rainbow trout in eastern streams, but it is not necessary. They have won their own way into the hearts of most anglers. We must allow for patriotism, prejudice, and often for exaggeration in matters piscatorial. We can sometimes find prejudice rampant even in books by great authorities. Fly-fishing is a recreation, and a great many fishermen have neither time nor opportunities to observe closely and record every detail of the sport they enjoy so greatly. What a pity it is that G. S. Marryatt did not keep a diary, and that his letters do not seem to have been preserved. The loss to the lovers of the floating fly is very great, as he was not only a wonderful fisher but a man of remarkably attractive personality, judged by the few records we have of him.

The long drought in June, July, and August the past season was not favourable to fishing by day, although large trout were killed at night.

Late in the season I weighed a native trout over 3 lb. killed on a floating Stonefly in a lake. The angler caught the natural fly on the stream and gave it to me, and I tied an artificial after it. He trolled for two days without success, then saw a trout rising, put up a "Hardy-Itchen" fly rod and the new fly, and hooked this fine trout at the fifth

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

cast. A lovely fish. I tried to get vouchers for the 60-lb. carp, but, so far, the best weight I have from the Wallkill is 45 lb. However, the people down in that country have a contempt for carp. Does anyone know how to cook this fish in such a way that it is really good to eat?

One gathers a vast amount of information when living on a trout stream, but scientists tell us that we forget at least half of what we learn in *one* minute. We should carry a dictaphone and cackle our observations into it while we are fishing. I fished exclusively with floating flies, but there were many fishermen, and at times, particularly in broken water, early in the season, wet flies were very killing.

### AMERICAN NOTES

F. G.  
JANUARY 17,  
1914

YOU ALREADY HAVE a national collection of artificial flies in the many English and Scotch books on angling. There you will find formulas for hundreds of salmon flies, thousands of trout and other flies, yet the renderings of these will always differ slightly in the best professional and amateur work. How many fly-dressers have you in the United Kingdom?

In fancy patterns, lures, and salmon flies we must follow the best formulas procurable, but in imitations of insects we should have the natural fly before us. Illustrations and formulas are not of much value in rendering of colours, and an imitation of an imitation will not satisfy the man who collects flies on many waters.

We wish to reproduce as nearly as possible the effect of the insect as it floats upon the stream; to deceive trout that have had enough experience of flies and of fishermen to make them a bit shy and crafty. When the fish take freely, without discriminating, the amateur fly-dresser is not satisfied. Something has been lost, and he will be happier with half a dozen good trout which yielded only to the attractions of a special fly, dressed after some study of the naturals that are or have been upon the water.

We are thankful for many mercies, and especially that the art of



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fly-fishing can never become one of the exact sciences, subject to a number of printed rules for all seasons, times, and places, with cross references to the state of the weather, time of day, humidity, air pressure, and temperature. No real *sport* can be reduced to a "sure thing."

What would an English sportsman say when he struck a region where foxes were trapped and shot on runways before the dogs? In this rough country it is impossible to ride to hounds, and the fox is never caught. A man must be in best physical condition and know the country thoroughly in order to get his fox, as the chase is often a long one, up and down mountains, through woods and swamps. I saw several beautiful skins of red and grey foxes recently.

The great boom in furs has collapsed in all the markets of Europe and America. Large firms in Leipsig have failed, London auction sales were disappointing, and enormous stocks of furs were carried over from last season. In the country districts nearly all the men and boys are interested in trapping, and the low prices now being offered by fur buyers are very disappointing. I think that the most comfortable top-coat for cold-weather driving is one lined with muskrat, which is now comparatively low in price. This fur is very soft and warm, yet quite light in weight. The skins are now quoted at about 30 cents, after selling up to \$1.10 each two years ago.

I have had poor ruffed-grouse shooting this year, and gained nothing by changing my ground. Beech nuts and other feed were scarce, the ruffed grouse had moved, and in the coverts near my quarters were scattered and very wild. Good sport is of great assistance in putting a man in good tough condition, and no game bird requires more honest hard work than the ruffed grouse. I know that I was much annoyed when a cat was allowed to steal one of a brace which I had presented to a friend. I remembered the everlasting tramping for an occasional long shot at a brown phantom.

We have had a good spawning season for trout, with plenty of water, as we have had much rain and several freshets—in fact we had

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

one of the highest floods that have been known in many years. As the timber is cut off the distribution of the rain and snowfall becomes more irregular, the climate changes, and floods are more dangerous, or injure the steams more and more; also whole fields have been cut to pieces and swept away, leaving nothing but beds of stones many acres in extent.

Why is it that very large trout have a way of rolling up to the surface in August and September? This habit is quite well known in many waters where trout over four or five pounds are found. I do not refer to feeding upon minnows or flies, as these fish are not feeding. They may rise quietly, but often make the water fly. It is tremendously exciting, and usually disappointing, as they will rarely take a fly or bait of any kind. The water is often too warm to please a trout at that season, but the fish may feel the approach of the spawning season. In one very deep pool of great extent these big fish cannot ascend the stream above. I am thinking of brown trout now, but the native *fontinalis* of North-western Maine used to have the same trick. I have not been in that State for some years.

[I have had some nice baskets of trout from time to time with flies of his own making sent me by Mr. Theodore Gordon, whose notes are always interesting. I wish he were here at this moment to see the blackbirds and starlings feeding on our lawn. I often wonder what it is the starlings pick out of the ground so assiduously—probably young shoots of grass. As regards big trout rolling up to the surface in August and September, I have occasionally seen the same thing over here, especially big reservoir trout; it is probably only a way of stretching themselves, a habit common to most animals—"stretch and grow," as the old saw says. Salmon, of course, very often do it. I remember remarking to the late Sir Ford North, after watching him fish a salmon pool on the Spey, that several fish had shown behind him as he fished down, and his saying, "Yes, it is often the case after a line has been over them." Mr. Gordon has kindly promised me an account of the life-history of the eel from an American scientific magazine.—R. B. M.]

# THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

## A LITTLE TALK ABOUT SPORT

F. S.  
FEBRUARY 7,  
1914

WHEN A MAN expresses his opinions in regard to sport, and his personal preference for one sort or another, one is apt to gain an insight into his temperament, disposition and the nature of his experience.

But when the love of sport is innate, or inbred, from our earliest years, we are fond of all branches that we know, particularly those which we have been permitted to enjoy in our puppy days. We are given a rod and line before we are trusted with a gun or rifle, so that our earliest recollections of sport are usually associated with fishing—and the immense excitement of pulling out a small wriggling trout, sun-fish, or chub.

My nurse did not know how to tie a small hook to a fine line, so she stuck it on with red sealing wax. This daub of red probably added to the natural attractiveness of the worm bait, as, in spite of childish awkwardness, a small silvery fish was at once yanked through the air. This one capture was enough joy for that day, or rather the wish to take the prize to my mother prevailed over any desire for further slaughter. The longing for a real gun of one's own becomes very strong at ten years of age, as by that time the boy has seen some shooting in the field and has been allowed to fire a few shots at easy marks under the care and direction of grown-up sportsmen. In two or three years he is strong enough to handle a weapon effectively and begins shooting in earnest. All American boys play baseball, hockey, ride, swim, row and sail a boat, if they are lucky, but shooting and fishing are different. They are the real sports, and if you ask a boy which he prefers his answer will be influenced by the season of the year and the game or fish that may be in his neighborhood or within his reach in one way or another.

He begins to long for trout fishing in January and the saving of pocket money for necessary tackle is a serious matter. His purchases are made weeks in advance, and he would love to spend the day in the shop studying its endless treasures. The night before the season opens he is so much excited that he sleeps but little. The weather may be atrocious, rain, hail, snow and wind may greet him in the morning,

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

but fish he must. (I remember taking 38 trout with fly while snow was falling on a cold "All Fools Day.") The boy's early experience in shooting game are quite as exciting and important. His first quail, woodcock and snipe are gold medals proving his skill. He can shoot "on the wing." His first ruffed grouse almost scares him; it seems as big as a turkey. Ducks are large game. They are so wary that his heart almost breaks before he succeeds in bagging one or two. He carries them in such a way that every one may see and admire. I am afraid that many of his earlier successes are due to kind fortune, good luck, not skill. He stumbles upon the game and blazes away. He kills difficult shots and misses easy ones.

I remember missing two fat woodcock that flushed at my feet. While almost weeping because I could not find them again, I stumbled upon the bank of a large stream and within easy range of a bunch of particularly wild mallards, which had been much hunted. The gun was fired somehow, before it was too late, and a splendid drake splashed back from on high.

We had such a variety of sport and the seasons for shooting and fishing were long. Nearly always there was something in view. I fancy that the best sport was where there was a little of everything and not much of anything. It is not so much the abundance of game, but its quality and the difficulties in the way of bringing it to bag. Again—large game may be quite plentiful yet the nature of the country such that still hunting is rarely successful. I remember tramping all day among the hills, in a pouring rain, in a desolate country. I fancied that deer were scarce until my return through a neck of the great swamp,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles wide at this point. Here I found the fresh tracks of 13 deer and 3 panthers (puma or mountain lion). One of the latter was an immense fellow, which I trailed to the top of a little rise in the swamp where there was a big ant hill. He had used this to get a better view of his surroundings, and the prints of his fore feet were perfect. He was a buster, but such chaps are rarely abroad in the daytime. A good pack of dogs would start much game in such a country, but the going was frightfully bad and the swamp 30 miles long.

Upon the whole I fancy that the best sport with the gun is to be

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enjoyed with a brace of noble, well trained setters or pointers, in a country fairly well stocked with a variety of game birds. One must work his own dogs and find the game himself, to have the best of this; guides and gamekeepers are not to be desired. A friend of mine who owned several of the best dogs in the United States was forced to leave them at home, because of distemper in his kennels. We were shooting woodcock during a big flight, and I did my best in the worst covers with the dogs, giving him lots of shooting.

He said that he should have had a large bag but that the absence of his dogs spoiled his pleasure and put him off in his shooting. (He was a very fine shot.) Rarely have I seen so many woodcock, and it was perhaps as well that we had but a short afternoon with them. Enough is enough, but it is hard to quit on such occasions. We work hard for days, sometimes, for a few shots and a brace or so in bag. In fact, I have, of late years, put in whole days without firing a shot, but this does not distress me, provided that I have the excitement of pursuit—and, nowadays, one should be very moderate in his anticipations of sport.

We are fond of all sorts of fishing, but fly-fishing for trout has been beloved. It is a passion that grows with the years, and we can never become indifferent to it, as we are always learning something that is interesting. As a sport it is possessed of infinite variety, but to get the best of it I fancy that we must confine ourselves to the use of the artificial fly. If the fish are not rising freely and we resort to bait of any kind, we lose faith and may never discover the uttermost possibilities in the artificial insect. There is always something to puzzle over and think about, and one solitary trout may defy us throughout a whole season.

At last we deceive him by using the finest tackle, after the greatest circumspection in approaching his well-known haunt. And then! Why, then he smashes our tackle and retains the fly as a souvenir. It does not worry him at all; he is only a little more difficult than before, and may live for several years, although many fishermen know him well.

Trout are often hungry and at times easily taken, but we love to think of them as always shy and well-fed. In streams that are alive with larvæ and flies they are in good condition very early, but these are usually in the lowlands. The mountain rivers are much later.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

It is not difficult to keep up a good stock of trout if we have the pure cold water and the food, but game is different, another matter. Our prospects for fly-fishing are better than for shooting, but I trust that we may continue to have a little all-around sport.

### FLIES WITH HACKLE POINTS FOR WINGS—BEST RODS HAVE AN INDIVIDUALITY

F. G.  
MARCH 21,  
1914

[THERE IS, of course, nothing new in the use of the delicate points of small cock's hackles for winging duns and spinners. When Francis Francis first brought out his fly, called after him "The Francis," in the *Field* of 1858 or 1859, a perfect shoal of letters appeared from anglers saying the idea was as old as the hills, etc. One angler said that many years previously he had found that on the trout streams in the Pyrenees the natives had shown him very delicate flies hackled with natural blue and red hackles, and winged generally with the points of hackles of the same colour. There is nothing new in it, but it is good. Mr. Theodore Gordon, knowing I like hackle tips for wings for both wet and dry patterns of duns and spinners, kindly sent me a baker's dozen of his own making, which I hope ere these lines are published to have tried on some trout—if the salmon give us time, which I hope they will not do. It is a curious coincidence that some of these charming flies are hackled with the almost invisible pearly-white transparent hackles which Mr. E. M. Tod has been writing about in the *Fishing Gazette* recently. These hackles are just like the spikes on a round ball of thistle-down; they do not mask or veil the body at all as a coch-y-bondhu, or furnace, or strong red or grey hackle does more or less, but when oiled they float the fly just as well, and one can easily introduce, as I suggested the other day, a couple of turns of some dark or darkish hackle to represent the limited number of natural legs of a dun, spinner, Mayfly, etc.—R. B. M.]

I trust that climatic conditions are more agreeable in England than here. I have had a little luck in hackles, although disappointed in birds bred by a farmer friend. I must try to send you a card to show the very best secured in various ways. As I had been living very economically for two years, I thought I would try to formulate the advan-

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tages and disadvantages of the various types of fly-rods, but I fear that I cannot do it. One would have to buy and test many rods thoroughly to benefit young anglers in the choice of a rod. *I fancy also that the best rods are individual, and cannot be copied exactly, owing to differences in the cane or bamboo.* I tramp about in the snow every day, wearing a coat lined with sheep's wool—warm in any weather, and short for walking.

It seems to me that Blacker's list of foreign bird feathers for salmon-flies is far more extensive than is usually employed by salmon-fly dressers nowadays. Aside from game birds, ducks, swan, turkey, guinea-fowl, and cock's hackles, the list is really quite short—say, Indian crow, toucan, blue chatterer, macaw, ibis, jungle-fowl (game bird), bustard (game bird); there are few that are required for all the best patterns.

[I think that Mr. Gordon has put the position as regards the individuality of a good rod very happily in the words I have put in italics. I have very often tried to get a favourite old rod matched, and although I have had wonderfully good copies, I have never had one which is exactly the same. Of course the fact that a favourite rod must have been in use some time to become a favourite adds to the difficulty, because obviously what ought to be copied is the rod after, say, the first week's use, and not after a season or two. Every rod must lose some part of its original stiffness from continued use. A poor rod originally stiff enough very soon becomes of the invertebrate order; a good rod, on the other hand, soon settles down to its pace, and seems to stick there for years. Perhaps we keep pace with the rod, and so do not recognise the change, if there is any. At one time in salmon-fishing I used a fine, powerful, heavy 18-ft. greenheart fly-rod, casting a heavy line day after day, and enjoyed it. Now I think a much lighter (16-ft. or 17-ft.) rod with a finer reel-line is—well, say more scientific! especially when one's right arm has been fractured in two places. I fancy Mr. Plevins has cast fifty yards with a 15-ft. salmon-fly rod; anyway, he has done well, over 40 yards, which is far more than one can fish properly as a rule. The days of the very heavy salmon rod with very heavy salmon reel to balance it are gone forever. In all

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branches of angling Arnold's "sweetness and light" is the cry—sweet in action and light in the hands. I hope to live to see the day when no angler will use a triangle, because it is unfair to the fish which beats you. I was pike-fishing with a friend the other day; he was using an old Blue Phantom with two triangles. A pike of 6 lb. or 7 lb. took it, and, as it came in very quietly, my friend drew it to the shallow side and was about to lift it out by the wire trace, when it gave a powerful dash with its big tail and dorsal and ventral fins and broke the line above the trace; it had the Phantom with the six strong hooks in its mouth, and although it was only a greedy pike I do not like to contemplate the fate of that fish. A pike has a tremendous "twist," and to starve slowly in the midst of plenty must be a worse fate than any even Dante invented.—R. B. M.]

### RONALDS AND UNSUNNED STARLING FEATHERS

[Somebody—I forget who it was—who, I think, mixed Ronalds up with some other writer, spoke disparagingly of him, and referred to Ronalds' recommending unsunned starling feathers—that is, from young birds only just able to fly. I pointed out that Ronalds was a very reasonable, undogmatic writer, and that I did not believe he even mentioned unsunned starling. I know that in some old angling writer of the eighteenth century I have seen unsunned starling recommended for winging duns; but the first angler to recommend it to me was Mr. Geo. M. Kelson, one lovely summer day, when he and I and that jolly, genial angler the late Mr. James McRac were fishing the latter's water on the Wandle. I was glad to get this note from that keen American fly-fisher and A 1 amateur fly-dresser Mr. Theodore Gordon.—R. B. M.]

It seems to me that Ronalds wrote simply and unaffectedly. Not a word about "unsunned starling" in my edition of 1839 (the second, coloured by himself). I do not wonder that the old writers loved young starling wing feathers for trout flies. I have had very few of them, but they are lovely for pale, delicate duns. Also under the wings are feathers of a pale dun with honey edges, a good substitute for the dotterel.



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

### A LITTLE TALK ABOUT THE COLOR SENSE IN FISHES

F. S. IT SEEMS odd that the old controversy in regard to  
MARCH 4, 1914 the color sense of fishes should break out anew in  
such a paper as the *London Times*, but the discussion  
centers on the Atlantic salmon, an immensely important species in  
the British islands, both as a commercial and a sporting fish.

Also, an extension of the present strict laws for the protection of  
wild birds has been proposed, which would interfere with the manu-  
facture of salmon flies, quite an important industry in England, Ire-  
land and Scotland, by which many people gain a livelihood. There is  
much evidence that the laws in force for some years are seriously  
injuring the fisheries, as rapacious birds, such as gulls, cormorants and  
herons, have multiplied unduly, but the proposed laws have to do  
with foreign birds carrying brilliant or beautiful feathers. These birds  
were, I believe, protected in a measure, but fly-dressers were allowed  
the purchase of those most necessary to the making of salmon flies.

It is said that salmon can not detect differences in color. In  
some species of fishes the male assumes a gorgeous livery on approach  
of the breeding season, evidently for the purpose of attracting the  
female, as is so often the rule with many birds. (In birds of prey the  
female is usually the larger and more powerful, and the hen woodcock  
is larger than the male.)

Round-eyed creatures may be very keen of vision in regard to color  
and motion, but are, we believe, deficient in *form*, as compared with  
the almond-eyed human beings. But the subject is a difficult one, even  
for a man of great experience, because of conflicting evidence at  
various times, and on different waters—the light, the position of the  
sun, the insect life of the stream, and habits of the fish, and roughness  
or mirrorlike smoothness of the water.

In one small lake large fish were continually leaping at dragon  
flies, moths and butterflies that flew high above the surface, but when  
there was a birth of small insects the same trout fed very quietly, and  
it was often desirable or necessary to have a good imitation in color  
and size, otherwise one might cast all day without getting a fish.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

Salmon fresh from the ocean are not very particular, and are usually free risers, and this is but natural. They are inexperienced, full of life and vigor, and have been in the habit of feeding upon the rich food furnished by the sea. The longer they are in the river, the harder they are to lure. The flies must be smaller and smaller, and usually quiet in coloring, until they resemble some well-known trout flies.

I was much interested in studying the diaries of an old salmon angler who had fished the rivers of New Brunswick for fifty years. There were diagrams and drawings of most of the pools on all the best streams, the lies of the salmon at different stages of water were shown, and the flies used, from soon after the breaking up of the ice until the close of the season were stuck into the leaves. Now this same angler believed that the salmon took the fly in excitement and rage. He had hidden himself where he could see the fly, which was being worked by a friend, and had been very near a number of salmon when they seized the fly. Yet from his own records one might adduce evidence that after being in the river some time the fish actually rose because of resemblance to natural flies in size and color.

It is so in all fly-fishing. Conditions vary constantly, and there are considerable differences in the habits of trout in various streams. They sometimes rise at all sorts of flies, and again they are very particular. Some waters are peculiarly suited to small flies, as the fish are in the habit of feeding upon them, and insect life is plentiful. The dry-fly angler here finds opportunity for the use of all of his skill and experience. On mountain rivers early in the season wet flies will often kill fish rapidly, particularly in the rapid-flowing water.

In the dawn of fly-fishing in ancient Greece a cock's hackle and bit of wool constituted the first "fly" known. In the early part of the last century native fishermen in this country made flies almost as simple in construction. They were tied on two to four horsehairs and the leader was also of hair. A horsehair leader with two flies attached was sold at from sixpence to a shilling. The favorite line was of twisted hair, and I have seen very pretty specimens.

For several hundred years our tackle and flies have been improved and refined, but the advance has been rapid in the last hundred years. There has been a vast increase in the number of anglers, and on many

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

of the best streams the fish have learned a thing or two. There is no doubt that they gain an education in hard-fished waters, although they may be simple enough during the early season, when hungry after the winter's short commons. They are always easier to deceive in broken water; the true test is to be had over shy fish in quiet pools or slow-flowing runs.

We have always had a number of different schools advocating certain faiths and theories, and men will continue to differ. The same assertions have been made over and over again. An old writer advises "three black palmers, and also three red." One man swears by four flies, another by half a dozen. Mr. Pennell was sure that three typical flies for salmon and three for trout were enough, but several times he has brought out other flies. You will always find that a man has a preference, no matter how few flies he believes in, but I have noticed that the angler who sticks to the artificial fly and refuses to use bait for trout usually carries a fair assortment.

I have fished streams where a variety of small imitations seemed absolutely necessary to good sport. I have seen the trout take a pale yellow freely and decline a fly only a few shades darker and this held good in other colors.

Much time, thought and labor have gone into the study of insects out of the manufacture of flies and of tackle. Many of our best and wisest men have not only enjoyed the sport, but have spent days and weeks in observing the habits of the fish, in studying their life history, and in writing books designed to help and inform anglers. If fish were color blind, much of the fascination of fly-fishing would vanish. Much human effort would seem to have been wasted. We cannot estimate the value of a man's opinions unless we know the nature of his experience.

I think I could back any argument by quoting only one side, one set of experiences, but I will take one which seems fair, as it refers not to trout or salmon, but to black bass. During an entire season and one month of another, I was trying to make flies that would be really of value, for the region in question. The only man who had faith (beside myself) was a professional duck hunter, always on or near the water.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

I worked away at odd times and he tried the flies with poor success, until at last one morning he entered my office in triumph.

"You have got it now," he said. "They will take this every time." In his hand was the fly, dressed in a number six sproat hook. At once we arranged for a thorough trial upon the first holiday.

Meanwhile I tried quite a bunch of the flies, but knowing that red had always been considered a good color for bass, I made a number of the flies with red bodies, although identical in other respects. We made up a party of six and voyaged to waters said to be well supplied with bass. It was a rarely beautiful day, but for a time things were a bit slow, although I took a few fish. Then the bass began to feed and the sport became very exciting.

We fished together and the fish rose at every cast. They took the new fly *exclusively*. The red-bodied flies on the same casts were entirely neglected by the bass, but a few perch rose at them. We quit fishing after killing 118 fish, 85 of which were fine bass. On the way to the boat we followed the banks of a wide canal, through which the dark, clear water was flowing rapidly. At intervals a good bass would be seen to strike at something; the heavy loads of fish would be put down and I would cast to the bass. I think I took every one we saw. But all refused the fly with red body and not one bass was taken upon it.

I could quote many instances when the color of fly and its resemblance to the natural made all the difference between success and failure. In some cases the other man had the fly and filled his basket, while I took a few small trout. In others I had the fly and remember convincing some quite obstinate unbelievers.

Then I had a large quantity of evidence pertaining to salmon flies, as for a number of years I gave a few special patterns to friends and, in fact, to all anglers who would use them on both sides of the Atlantic. But the difficulties in obtaining materials were great, even twenty years ago, and making intricate copies of salmon flies requires much time and close attention.

Years ago there were a good many first-rate salmon fly dressers in New York, Philadelphia and Boston, usually English or Irish, and they made a fair living. Their trout flies sold for \$1.50 or more a

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dozen, and salmon flies from \$6.00 to \$9.00 a dozen. Nowadays fishing tackle manufacturers find difficulty in securing and keeping good fly tiers, for as the remuneration is small, they are apt to seek other employment.

But in Great Britain it is different. Such a large number of men and women have been carefully trained and make their living by it, that any law seriously interfering with the supply of materials would cause great distress. As a matter of fact, outside of game birds, ducks, turkeys, guinea fowls, swans and cocks, the list of birds whose plumage is necessary for all the best standard patterns is a short one. Indian crow, toucan, macaw, ibis, jungle fowl (game bird, wild chicken), bustard (game bird), blue chatterer, will nearly cover it, in spite of the many tropical birds mentioned in all of the old books on salmon fly dressing.

What we need is not hot controversy, but common sense and reasonable, considerate action for humanity. We love birds, but the important and most useful ones are to be found at home, and not in jungles and swamps.

A campaign against cats, particularly during the breeding season, would save the lives of an immense number of the birds that add so much to the beauty and charm of the country.

Foreign birds should be preserved from extinction by reasonable restrictive laws, but they should serve man, even if they have handsome plumage.

## SMALL TALK ABOUT RODS FOR FLY-FISHING

F. S.  
APRIL 4, 1914

IT SEEMS to me, nowadays, that the bigger the man the smaller the reel or gun he wishes to use—feather-weights, in fact.

I had a small bore, extreme choke Greener some years ago that worried me, because it was so light that there was no stability to it. It was like a feather in the hand. In cover one either missed his bird or absolutely destroyed it. (I detest mangled game.) It was a very pretty weapon in the open, say on wild snipe, or single ducks, where one could exercise the same care and judgment that he would use in

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aiming a rifle, but it was too light for me. Tastes differ, as, in a short time, I sold it to an athletic gentleman, six feet three inches in his stockings, who complained that his gun, weighing seven and one-quarter pounds, was too heavy for him. He tried to use the little Greener for a riding whip, on a mule, and knocked off the stock. In time he had the extreme choke reamed out and he liked the gun.

It is much the same in fly rods. One well-known fly fisherman has sixteen of these, and has steadily progressed in the direction of shorter and lighter weapons, until last season his favorite weighed two and one-half ounces. He is an expert and casts well with anything, but I should love to see him hitch up with a good solid three- or four-pounder, in a big bold stream, on full water in May, when it is cold and the trout are full of life, strength and deviltry. I think a great deal about the man of limited means and opportunities. He may be a fine fisher and love the sport passionately. He loves a fine rod and will deny himself many things to get it, but he can have but one for all his fly-fishing. He expects this rod to last for years and to serve him perfectly in all sorts of fly-fishing, from the most delicate casting in hard-fished brooks to playing successfully some monster of the river, the prize of a lifetime. If he is a dry-fly or up-stream fisher he requires a rod with considerable backbone (power), which will enable him to cast into the wind with accuracy. It is exasperating to be obliged to make half a dozen casts to place the fly correctly.

Very little has been said about the handles on fly rods, and in the effort to obtain light weights on the scales the hand grasp has been cut down to an extremely small diameter. Ask any fly-fisher who is not ambidextrous, and fishes only occasionally, where he feels most fatigue and he will be apt to tell you that it is in the grasp of the right hand. A comfortable handle of fair diameter is a boon on any fly rod. Personally, I like the old Wells hand grasp and I see that it has been copied in England. They have been imitating our best rods for years, but we doubt if they can duplicate the life and responsiveness of the American. One can become accustomed to any action, but to have a rod that suits your style and temperament is delightful. It adds greatly to one's pleasure, and the mere casting of the fly is enjoyed, even when the trout are down and will not rise. If you are

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limited to one rod, do not select one of the extremes in weight, although the tendency is apparently in the direction of short and light rods. A six-ounce rod of ten feet may be far more comfortable and satisfactory in use than a three-ounce of eight feet. Some of the best fishermen use the nine-and-a-half-foot rod, although the nine-footer is a great favorite with dry-fly men; but suit *yourself*, that is the great desideratum. One man wants a rod that plays freely right into the hand, another prefers a firm butt and fine point. The best rod I ever had measured ten feet, yet I once had a very short weapon that was quite perfect for small streams or boat work. But we are selecting one rod for its suitability to all sorts of conditions that will afford us the greatest pleasure in casting and effectively handling hooked fish. We may have to cast the smallest of midge "flies," or a bass fly, upon occasions. Compare a number of rods in the shop with reel in place, make them play from the wrist in a small figure of eight. Revolve slowly and see that there are no weak points. As I remember it, Wells' "Fly Rods and Fly Tackle" is one of the most practical books on angling that I ever read, but it was written before dry-fly fishing became general, and his rods were built for Maine and the use of large flies.

If one is taking up fly-fishing for the first time I would strongly advise the purchase of one of the excellent rods that are now to be had at very moderate prices. There has been a wonderful improvement in all rods in this class during the last twenty years, and one can find any length or action desired. In time, after getting one's sea legs and taking one's bearings, one begins to long for the very best rod that can be made, and then, through experience, he will select a weapon that will serve him perfectly for twenty years or more. It is quite instructive to watch the fortunate individuals who can and do manufacture their own split bamboo rods. They will turn out rods of various lengths and weights, but notice what they habitually *use* in their fly-fishing. In my experience it is *not* the very light rod. I notice that the great English authority on dry-fly fishing prefers a powerful rod and that in his instructions he urges great deliberation in casting. The movements are to be slow and easy, and all the power of the rod is brought out, but he casts only to rising trout and is inactive for

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long periods during the day. Now the American rod is usually quick and nervous in action, it has wonderful life and resiliency, and is built to suit American methods and temperaments, yet many English dry-fly men prefer our Leonard rods. Sometimes they have two or more for small fly and mayfly fishing. Personally, I wish that our rods could be weighed and reckoned without handles, as I much prefer a rather fat, comfortable hand grasp, and weight in the hand has (within the small limits to be considered) practically no influence in causing fatigue. It is the weight outboard that is tiring—a long rod, or one with a stout top joint and a kick in the butt, is more fatiguing than a short one. I have seen beautiful work done with limber rods twelve feet long and splendid casting with stiff Tournament rods of nine feet (the latter require a heavy line), but modern practice is all in favor of the quick, resilient, up-to-date weapons. Charles Kingsley considered any man a weakling who objected to single-handed rods weighing one pound or more. He loved the brown alder fly, on hooks of fair size, but he fished for big brown trout, in a stream full of weeds. Irishmen are celebrated for using limber rods.

A big greenheart Castle Connell salmon rod kicks like a heavily loaded gun. Englishmen are supposed to prefer stiff rods of considerable weight, but their practice has certainly been considerably changed or modified by the advent of the light yet powerful American dry-fly rod. We have now such splendid rods of all lengths and weights that any man may be satisfied, but I would advise the novice, if he expects varied fishing in many waters, not to go to extremes. Let the rod be nine, nine and one-half or ten feet in length, and be not over-anxious for the least possible weight on the scales. Any handle desired can be had upon the rod, at small additional cost. I have seen hand grasps that had been enlarged at home with rubber or cork. An E line, I think, should be sufficiently heavy to bring out the action of the rod you choose for stream fishing. If a first-rate spring is put into one of the cheap "Feather-light" reels it is good enough for anyone, but the spring that comes in the reel is usually of poor material. It breaks at the most inconvenient moment. I wish that we had noiseless click reels. I have one fine old Abbey & Imbrie (I am afraid to say how old) that still sings the same old song. Nobody within half a mile can fail to hear



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it when it is busy, and I detest attracting the attention of everyone in the county when I am fishing. I have tried out a great many rods in the past two years and hope that at some time I may be able to formulate the advantages and disadvantages of the various types without being biased by my own preferences. I know how important it is to secure a rod that is perfectly suited to one's style and method, and the additional pleasure and satisfaction to be derived from such a tool.

Casting with the perfectly designed rod one is not conscious of any effort in ordinary fishing. The wrist only is used and the rod does all of the work. In fact, the line seems to fly out and retrieve itself, and the fly alights softly without the suggestion of a splash. With it one can use the finest gut near the fly without leaving the said fly in the trout's mouth on the strike. A very slight movement of the rod is required to drive the hook home, over the barb. The trout hooked, we must have enough power to guide, and in a measure control it. It must be butted away from snags, roots and other entanglements. Brown trout in some streams have a habit of rushing at once into holes under rocks or ledges, and this is a dangerous trick. In a big bold water rainbows often run downstream, and brown trout sometimes do so. If large, such a fish cannot be held or played against the stream, but must be followed. It is easier to lose a fish by reason of the hook tearing out, with a stiff rod than with a more pliant one. With the latter nothing approaching a dead pull is possible. It yields to every effort of the fish, yet the grip of the hook is never relaxed, nor slack line given. But the light, pliant rod lacks power to control fish in dangerous situations, or to cast into even a moderately strong breeze.

The dry-fly and upstream fisher needs power, but the rod should not be so stiff that an extra heavy line is required to bring out its action. D line is the limit, in my opinion, and the range of sizes required may be limited to D, E and F, double-tapered, air-pump dressed, soft-finish lines. These might be designated stout, medium and fine, but the lines made by manufacturers vary somewhat in diameter and weight. At one time the fly lines containing a copper thread were quite popular, as they were heavy in proportion to size. All things considered, one may select a rod that handles a regular E line (tapered) in the shop, with reasonable assurance that it will work

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well on the stream. Very light rods may be used in boat work, particularly if one has a good man at the paddle or oars. One can cheat the wind, and if a big fish is hooked the guide will back up the rod, in playing it, doing quite half the work. In this country much salmon fishing is done from canoes, and with first-rate guides the most inexperienced of men is usually successful, if he is on a good river holding a fair stock of fresh-run salmon. A river that admits of casting from the bank and wading is a more sporting proposition and requires more skill.

But we are talking about trout-fly rods with the knowledge that at this season all tackle is interesting. I should enjoy trying out a new fly rod every year. There is much enjoyment too in fiddling with artificial flies. One never tires of these small creations, and it is really worth while to spend time in the buying or making of carefully selected patterns in dun, brown, orange and yellow. Red quills are good and many anglers have faith in the various patterns of whirling duns. All the duns are good at one time or another, but we are thinking of standard flies such as the Wickham's Fancy, which is known everywhere. One is embarrassed by the fact that there are so many dressings for some of our old friends. I found eight or nine of the yellow dun in one old book, but we want a few flies with light yellow bodies and harmonious legs and wings. The old Beaverkill is a good fly. You can put another wing on the Queen and call it an orange Ledge fly, if you like. It is not troublesome to note the colors of the natural flies on the streams one fishes and these are the best possible guides in selecting our colors. It is not worth while to bother with insects unless the trout are seen taking them, or they are to be found in the stomachs of the fish. I am not fond of the Royal Coachman, but it is a great killer on many waters, just the same, wet or dry. One thing is sure, the trout can scarcely fail to see it. Usually when I hear or know that one fly is taking great numbers of trout, I can discover the reason by patiently investigating the matter, but the R. C. resembles nothing except possibly a glorified ant.

It was the second season before I found that a small greenish-bodied insect was plentiful, and thus accounted for the popularity of a fly with a little green mixed with the dubbing of the body. A pale

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yellow perlidæ was very plentiful last season and an ephemera of different shade, with rather stout body and mottled wings. I think of flies mostly by name of the species and the color, or the materials that enter into them. Lou Darling's Catskill is good. So are Pale Evening and Silver Duns.

I fussed after a fly for two years and named it after a well-known angler. I took the color from an insect and added a gold ribbing to brighten it up, as I fancied that he liked gold ribs, and they mark the segments of the body well, if not too wide. This is a good pattern, and so is the gold-ribbed Hare's Ear, which is much darker in coloring. The stiff fibers from the hare's face must be carefully tied into this latter fly if it is to cock and float well. Lots of them are poor in this respect, if made from the ear only.

Nature is a great colorist and the tones in insects are fine and harmonious, but for the most part subdued. I never tried a dun-colored fly that pleased me that did not prove useful, and I like to have several shades in the box, from very pale to a dark iron or purplish blue. It is easy to use flies too large, yet a big trout will sometimes rise at a large fly when he would ignore a little one. One could easily fill a book with talk about insects, natural and artificial, so it may be well to call a halt.

## NEWS OF MR. HALFORD'S DEATH IN AMERICA AND OTHER NOTES FROM MR. T. GORDON

F. G.      THE NEWS of Mr. F. M. Halford's death carried  
MAY 9, 1914 a certain sense of personal loss. We really owed much  
to him. You may remember that his two first books  
gave me the dry-fly fever in 1890, and greatly increased my enjoyment  
of fly-fishing.

I am very glad that I preserved *as received* all the artificials he then thought advisable, including all the Duns, May Flies, Sedges, Ants, and fancy flies, all dressed by himself. There are two large sheets and his letter dated in November, 1891. He was always ready to assist anyone, and offered to try his hand on any insects I could send him

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in spirits. He thought that he could allow for discoloration or darkening of the colours.

I was thinking of "An Angler's Days in Dove Dale" the night before I read of Mr. Halford's death.

It seems to me that of all colours "white" is the most conspicuous in or on the water. If I remember correctly, the hackles you noted in *Fishing Gazette* were the rarest sort of Pale Duns and badger hackles. I have had but two or three necks in many years.

Last week I received samples of gut casting-lines dyed "amber," bright sky "blue" and light grass "green." A man in Portland devotes his entire attention to these leaders, and claims that they are far superior to mist-coloured ones. Amber (or coffee colour) is the least conspicuous in clear waters. His idea is that the surface of water acts as a mirror reflecting the character of the bottom. Amber for gravel and rocks; blue, next to amber, is best for bright weather, and green for weedy or mossy streams.

For dark or peat-stained waters a really black leader is best, and I am inclined to agree with this, as I have used black gut and black lines with considerable satisfaction. I will try all the colours, as I have ordered two more gut lines for May fishing.

Do you remember the little "Bulldog" pliers invented by G. S. Marryatt many years ago? They were designed to hold the entire plumes from two or four starling wings (right and left) when winging flies. I find these pliers a convenience for holding small things or tying silk.

Black bass sometimes rise well just after the sun has disappeared, and I have seen them feeding upon insects at this time.

We all love the evening rise of trout, but on calm days when the wind has hushed entirely and the quiet pools are like mirrors there is often for a short time a very bad light. The finest casting-lines and most delicate flies have a crude and coarse appearance, and our best efforts usually result in putting the trout down. The light must fade on such occasions before we can expect much sport.

Some of the most skilful wielders of the fly-rod have little confidence in imitation, or colour, and find their chief pleasure in manual dexterity. If the trout do not rise well to one or more of three

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or four flies, they think it of little use to continue, and mount a minnow or worm. I fancy that they lose one of the great pleasures of fly-fishing, and one that can be enjoyed during the close season.

Fish have much individuality (laugh, if you like). A fine female rainbow trout of 8 lb. weight I remember as a perfect shrew and habitual nagger in the New York Aquarium. She worried and tormented the other big trout in her tank, until at last the keeper removed her, and placed her in a tank with two salmon, which were lazy and quiet. Here she cruised about like a restless spirit, but her appetite for minnows was good, and she never lost flesh. We have all known trout that were wise and crafty, remaining in well-known haunts for years.

The river was clear on April 24 and a milder air prevailed, so I went forth seeking a place to cast a floating fly, but the stream seemed a headlong rush of crystal water. In one place, where there will be a good pool when the flood subsides, I killed two trout by persistent casting—not a fly on the water except my own. A minnow and a worm fisher were not doing well. The wind was high and nippy and the water intensely cold.

We will be well into the merry month of May before we have really good fly-fishing in this region.

### GEORGE LA BRANCHE'S "THE DRY FLY ON FAST WATER"

F. S.      THE LITERATURE of angling is now very large, and  
JUNE 27, 1914      upon the whole, America makes a very good showing. Since the time of J. J. Brown and his forgotten "Anglers' Guide," we have had a number of first-rate original writers. Frank Forester was among the first who wrote of field sports, but we are thinking of men native to this land. There was dear old Uncle Thad. Norris, Robert Barnwell Roosevelt, an uncle of Colonel Roosevelt, W. C. Prime, and many others. In recent years the out-of-doors', and sportsmen's magazines, have introduced a host of good men; sea fishing has been elevated to a science and we have such high authorities as Professor Holder, on the "Game Fishes of the World."

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Dr. Henshall was the recognized authority on the black bass, but, since he wrote, short casting rods, new methods, and a host of extraordinary artificial baits have come in. Many names occur to me, but it is unnecessary to mention them now.

For more than twenty years we were content to rely upon Englishmen as the supreme authorities on the use of the floating fly. Clever anglers began using this system regularly in the South of England about the year 1860; although we have records of the occasional use of the dry fly at an earlier date, in both countries. After the publication of Mr. F. M. Halford's "Dry Fly Fishing in Theory and Practice," 1889, the art was gradually adopted in this country, but it made no great stir. This we attribute to the fact that American anglers who had been in the habit of fishing upstream, with small flies, found the change from wet to dry comparatively easy. We have waters where conditions resembled those found in the South of England; but, for the most part, our anglers were accustomed to fishing the more turbulent mountain streams, on which the wet fly will always have its time and place. It was not until our sportsmen saw that the floater was frequently killing, when the wet fly failed, that the present vogue of the dry fly began. The first book on the subject appeared only two years ago. It was written by Mr. Emlyn M. Gill and undoubtedly caused a boom in dry-fly fishing in all parts of this country. But the demand for good works upon angling is inexhaustible. Thousands of anglers, old and young, experienced and inexperienced, welcome a new book by one of the fraternity and are delighted to invest a few shekels in its purchase. There are few things that give one more pleasure on a winter's night than a good work on fly-fishing.

I have just finished reading "The Dry Fly on Fast Water," by Mr. George M. L. La Branche (Charles Scribner's Sons), and expect to read it again. That, I fancy, is the test of a book or article. If we return to them with a relish they will surely please others.

Mr. La Branche is an old hand at the game; his style is direct and to the point. He is a close observer of the habits of the fish and loves to study the problems presented every day in the season on our rapid streams. They are always rising and falling; conditions are never quite the same from day to day. Mr. La Branche gives many hints and wrinkles, and the leaves from the book of his experience will

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prove of value to many. His point of view is original, and there is not a dull page in this book. He has no great faith in the imitation of the natural insects and gives a very short list of artificial flies, dressed upon Nos. 10 to 16 (sized) hooks. Size is important at times, he thinks, but he is not bigoted in any way. His theories are his own, but he is quite willing to allow other folks to have their own notions. We all have our opinions, based on a great or limited experience, and may at times become a trifle warm when asserting our views. It is just as well to remember that angling is only a recreation, not a profession. We usually find that men of the greatest experience are most liberal and least dogmatic. I remember an old angler saying to me some time ago: "I have fished for trout for forty years; I have studied their habits and the methods of taking them. Formerly I was quite sure that I had nothing to learn; I knew it all. Nowadays I make no such claims. I know very little about trout and never expect to know very much in regard to them." It is often the man of limited experience who is most confident.

There is nothing dogmatic in "The Dry Fly on Fast Water." I know Mr. La Branche by reputation, and his ideals are high. He fishes the floating fly only, and kills a few of the largest trout. All others are returned to the water. What splendid sport we would enjoy on free water, if fly-fishing only was practiced, and the limit in size was raised to respectable proportions! I fancy that a trout should be big enough to take line from the reel before it is considered large enough to kill. The best of days is often the one when but three or four fish have been taken. The killing of large trout is remembered with a thrill of pleasure when heavy baskets of small trout are forgotten. If we reckoned our baskets in pounds instead of in numbers it would be better. The statement that a man has killed fifty or one hundred trout makes not the slightest impression on one's mind, except possibly a slight feeling of disgust. We have seen too many such creels. I am afraid that we envy the angler who reports that old four-pounder we have known for years. I believe that all anglers who fish streams of rapid descent will find pleasure and profit in this purely American work on dry-fly fishing. I do not think that I have done the author justice.

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### GOLDEN FARIO

F. G. YESTERDAY I WAS fortunate enough to take one  
JULY 4, 1914 of those exquisite pale golden-yellow English or Scotch  
trout of the breed of *Salmo fario*, first introduced into  
the Neversink River, I fancy, about 1886. The largest I recollect  
was 5½ lb. I have always thought that these fish were from ova  
shipped by Mr. R. B. Marston to A. Nelson Cheney, Fish Commis-  
sioner of the State of New York.

They are quite distinct from the German brown trout, in coloration at least, and the variety is permanent. I have watched them month after month in the same pools with the brown trout, and they never changed. I cannot describe them. The belly is a brilliant light yellow, very bright pink spots in medallions, iridescent, no dark brown or black spots. I was afraid of killing this fish, and returned it at once, so have not a very clear impression of the details of its lovely coloration. I have seen none for several years, and was afraid that they were extinct. Have Loch Levens bellies of pure yellow gold? There is no hint of orange. Of course brown trout vary in coloration. I took a large fish a day or two ago that was covered with round black spots, few, if any, red ones; but these golden trout are very different. I remember that I winded myself terribly running with the first I caught in the effort to preserve it alive.

[It must have been about 1886 that I got ten thousand of the best English trout eggs from the late Mr. Thomas Andrews, of Guildford. He reared most beautiful fish. I fancy he got the eggs from High Wycombe trout through our old friend the late Mr. James Thurlow. At that time the Wick trout were the finest to be found anywhere. I sent them to Mr. Fred Mather and Mr. A. Nelson Cheney as a present, and as in some way to make up to American anglers for our having stolen some of their black bass. It was done by the man we sent out to get some black bass, without our knowledge. Finding he could not buy any, he got some poached for him out of Greenwood Lake, and there was an angry protest after an abortive attempt to stop the shipping of the fish. I am glad to hear the fish have thriven. They may have been Hampshire trout eggs, as Mr. Andrews got eggs



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from the best waters, and was a most successful fish breeder, except that he did not make it pay himself.—R. B. M.]

I am afraid that the more I study the question of the best rod for the man who will have but *one* for dry-fly fishing the less confident I become. Slight differences in bamboo affect the action.

For instance, I love a very stiff little nine-footer of  $5\frac{1}{4}$  oz., but have been trying a more powerful tool of 9 ft. 6 in.,  $5\frac{5}{8}$  oz. Now, the difference in weight is but  $\frac{3}{8}$  oz., and the rod is not so stiff, yet the increase in power is really astonishing. A fierce gale came down from the north on Wednesday, but it was an easy matter to drive the E line in the teeth of it. In fact, it was far more agreeable to cast into the wind than with it. The shorter rod has sufficient power, yet I fancy that many Englishmen would prefer the 9 ft. 6 in. rod (Tournament rods both).

### A LITTLE TALK ABOUT SALT WATER FISHING

F. S. I INVARIABLY READ or skim through all editorials in many periodicals, and did not miss a recent one in *Forest and Stream* on "Salt Water Fishing." JULY 18, 1914 I have never cared a great deal for deep sea fishing, but some of my pleasantest recollections are of sport along shore in sounds, estuaries and salt water rivers; also, around the "Keys" off the Florida coast.

We were dependent principally upon sail and oars for getting about, although naphtha launches and steam were used occasionally, and we often enjoyed the best of sport at small expense.

The best casting rods we had were made of whole bamboo, carefully selected by an expert from a large number of canes and cut down to suit individual tastes, usually about ten feet in length. The guides, tip and reel were lashed on securely and the best of fine Cuttyhunk lines, 200 to 300 yards, were used. The reels were nickel plated, and cost only about \$4.50 each, but gave good service and allowed reasonably long casts to be made.

We preferred forged Virginia bent hooks for bottom fishing, and long-shanked Carlisle for school or surface fishing. We often carried

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another rod, a long whole bamboo, with a strong braided line fastened to it direct, without a reel. This was for school fish which sometimes fed upon the surface at certain stages of the tides, for a short time only, when the greatest rapidity was necessary to make a bag before the fish went down. When the best of bamboo had been secured these rods possessed extraordinary strength, as may be evidenced by the following incident.

I had started down Green Island Sound in my small boat, with a view to fishing for "winter trout" (Southern spotted weakfish) but found that the tide was still too high, and the water discolored. I therefore came to anchor close inshore, and began catching small fish with rod and reel, to pass the time. There was a sort of pocket in the marsh grass in shore and presently I saw a sharp strike that looked like a trout taking a shrimp. I put away the casting rod and picked up the long bamboo, placing a large shrimp upon the hook.

At the first cast something ripped the bait off the hook and I tried again. This time there was no mistake. The hook was driven home sharply, and a heavy fish rushed fiercely out into the tide. Fortunately I had anchored carelessly and the whole of the anchor rope ran out. I braced myself with both feet, and gave the enemy the benefit of the whole spring of the cane. It seemed impossible that any rod would endure being doubled up in such a way, but it gave and rebounded again and again, as the fish rushed back and forth, in and out.

Presently I discovered that the beast was a shark and I was determined to kill it if possible. It was a long fight and I was played out myself when the shark gave in and was slid over the gunwale (with a lot of water) into the boat. I finished the brute with an oar as he seemed to wish to monopolize the standing room. This shark was five and one-half feet long—not what one would call large, yet big enough to demonstrate the strength of good bamboo. Remember, I had no reel, and the line was not twice the rod's length.

I remember this as a long day of hard work and poor luck until the evening, at dead low water. The wind had gone down and all was serene. The sun was just setting as a large school of trout rushed a herd of shrimp to the surface, and instantly the gulls were on deck, screaming and pouncing. No gulls had been in sight but they must

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have had sentinels on the watch, as they gathered to the feast with extraordinary quickness.

As the tide was almost dead (it had not begun to make) I had no difficulty in keeping within casting distance of the rising trout. It was quick, exciting work, and when the school went down I had thirty-five fish. My shrimp bait gave out and ten trout were taken with a phantom minnow, cast and fished very fast on top of the water. In November on neap tides I have seen many different schools rise during one day. The common weakfish were called "summer trout." The "whiting" seemed to be the same as the Northern kingfish. I ordered one of the latter at Delmonico's in New York to see if I could discover any difference.

There was fair sheepshead and channel bass (red drum and red fish) fishing in the estuaries, and good sport could be had on the banks out at sea with large fish. But my sport was inside, where I could go and return without expense or loss of time.

Everyone knows of the sport to be found on both coasts of Florida, yet it is hard to realize its infinite variety unless one has been there. Even if one goes to a resort celebrated for its fishing he may gain only a partial idea of the sport to be had elsewhere in Florida waters. Conditions vary greatly.

When I first arrived at the "Keys" I was thinking of orange groves and shooting, not of fishing, and was poorly provided with tackle. My rod proved to be defective and broke again and again in playing small fish. Very soon it was quite useless. Enormous quantities of the best food fish were taken by the professional net fishermen, but hand lines were favored by the local talent and no rods were in use. At last I secured a fine East India bamboo from a Negro for fifty cents and bought lines and good hooks. I was busy and wished to take advantage of fishing near at hand.

I learned that as soon as cool weather set in large numbers of "sea trout" came inside of a lot of trestle work running out to a dock, and I decided to make my first attack upon these. I went to a fish house and got a mullet. This fish is oily when large and has a very firm, white belly. I cut this white meat into minnow-shaped strips, and bought a large clothes or market basket instead of a creel. Then, marching out

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

upon the trestle work I began casting a line about twice the length of the rod, playing my extemporized minnow out in short darts.

My expectations were not great, so you may imagine my surprise when three or four silvery fish rose at every cast, and I found myself hooking, playing and landing them into my basket as fast as I knew how. Very soon I had to call two Negroes to carry away the spoils and they did this two or three times before I realized I had quite enough. I followed the last basket to the fish house and really my pile astonished me. The manager kindly weighed the entire catch and we found that in two or three hours I had basketed ninety-nine and one-half pounds.

During the two following years I had much fine sport at many places with all kinds of fish, but this first performance made a deep impression on my mind as my last fishing had been with artificial fly for brook trout in Pennsylvania. You can see that there was quite a change in everything pertaining to the sport.

Fifty years ago the good people of New York City had all kinds of salt water fish at their very door—or at least, within a very short distance from home.

Striped bass, weakfish, kingfish, sheephead, Spanish mackerel, bluefish, tautog and many other sorts, were plentiful and often of large size. Even to this day the big metropolis is not badly off for sport if one has a little time and knows where to go. I must knock off, as too many experiences are coming to mind.

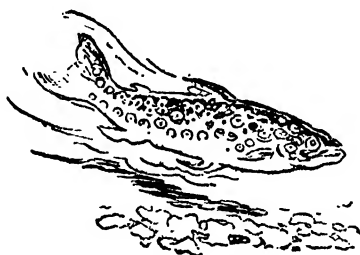


### AMERICAN NOTES

F. G.      YOU HAVE REASON to be proud of Sir Edward  
SEPTEMBER 19,      Grey, statesman and fly-fisher. His efforts to avert war  
1914      failed (inevitably), but he was guided throughout by  
the highest motives and a noble patriotism. We had  
hoped that England would remain neutral, but realise now that this  
was impossible. . . .

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

It is a curious and interesting fact that there is no generally accepted rule in fly-fishing without its exception. We all agree that "drag" in dry-fly fishing is fatal, yet upon occasions a slight movement of the fly in quiet water will bring up large trout when nothing else will serve. This is particularly true on lakes or ponds, but in rare instances a slight drag of the floating fly may bring results on streams. Six or seven years ago my mother was ill at a summer resort, and I did not dare to leave her for more than an hour or two in the evening. I knew of one big fish in a long curving pool half a mile from the hotel, and there were fair trout in the stream above. I fished this water with a midge fly, intending to change to a good-sized caddis fly before casting for the special prize. Sport was better than expected, and when I returned to the long pool I could not see the eye well enough to change flies. Having no time to spare, I floated the midge on the cast again and again over the exact lie of the trout without result. Becoming impatient, I drew the fly about three inches, and instantly there was a fierce rise and I was fast in the big chap (landed). Again, in fishing a much larger stream two good trout rose just as I began to recover line for a fresh cast. Since having these experiences I have tried a slight drag many times, and have induced other men to do so. The experiment usually fails, yet it has succeeded frequently enough to make it worth while, particularly on lakes where the very large trout rise only at long intervals. A spent spinner on a long hook may prove attractive, I fancy, because on these waters a very small dragon fly is sometimes abundant. Of course with a rise of duns or caddis flies one would choose something different. If the angler of experience will carry his memory backward he will find that there are few, if any, rules without exceptions. Prejudice is a handicap.



# THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

## AMERICAN NOTES

F. G.  
OCTOBER 24,  
1914

FROM TIME TO time we have read of many fly-tying vises, and a number of them have been illustrated in the *Fishing Gazette*. Of these the very best that I have used is one manufactured by S. Allcock and Co., of Redditch. It is the vise invented by a professional fly-dresser on the Usk, and is at once simple in construction and very strong.\* It is suitable for either large or small flies of any kind, and I particularly appreciate the perfect rigidity of the hook when I am making the Wickham or other metal-bodied flies. I began using a vise in tying floating flies, and sometimes regret that I did not continue with fingers only. Anyone can dress a fly with the assistance of a vise, but the real experts (I believe) do not require one. Perfectly dressed salmon flies are beautiful objects, and it will be noted that all the patterns that have won a great reputation on all salmon rivers are wonderfully fine in their colour schemes. For some years I had six dozen of Forrest and Son's (of Kelso) best flies arranged against the neutral-tinted wall of my bedroom, and with these, and others used for experimenting in clear water, thought that I gained a better notion of how flies appeared to the salmon. The patterns varied from the most elaborate to the old Tweed favourites, such as 'Topsy, Lady of Mertoun, Double White Tip, etc.

But why speak of such frivolities? We are now advised to return to first principles and the early days of fly-fishing, 2,000 years ago. A cock's hackle and a bit of wool are said to be quite sufficient. Imitation of naturals and studies in colouring are quite unnecessary, and all the lessons of the past 300 years have been studied in vain. I wish that Francis Francis was alive and could have his say in opposition to these heretics. Young anglers and others may be led astray, but the controversy has always been amusing. Read Webster, the author of the "Angler and the Loop Rod." He was confident that his method was

\* This excellent fly-tying vise was invented by Mr. Powell, the very courteous and clever angler and fly-tier and fishing-tackle maker of Usk. I noticed it when it first came out, and am glad to find Mr. Theodore Gordon speaks so highly of it.—R. B. M.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

the only proper one. He fished nine flies on a 15-ft gut casting line, and sometimes his whole basket of 20 lb. to 30 lb. of trout would be killed *on one* fly (of the nine). It is useless to dogmatise on matters piscatorial, but why endeavour to destroy a fine art? Fresh-run salmon may rise at almost anything, but look at the tiny flies used on low water, after the fish have been up some time. Large salmon have been killed on Test trout flies, such as Gold-Ribbed Hare's Ear. Trout when on the feed will often rise at flies of different colours, and again may be very nice in discriminating between patterns. Hard-fished, free water is a better test than a preserve where there are but a few fishers, but one must be liberal-minded enough to allow every mon to gang his ain gait and think and fish as he wishes.

I confess that, sometimes, I add tails to artificial flies made in imitation of insects which are without such appendages, and urge in extenuation of such a practice that it assists in floating and cocking the fly. Mr. Halford's refined patterns of sedges, brown ants, etc., are dressed with an enormous number of legs, and even the mayflies are heavily hackled to assist flotation, so we may hope that trout cannot count beyond the number six, the usual quantity of legs possessed by an insect. I have never found that the trout objected to superfluous tails. I suspect that many of our floating flies would prove inefficient if many insects did not buzz when on the water, as some of the shop flies rejoice in an inordinate supply of hackles, resembling somewhat a miniature toothbrush.

Mr. Stuart, the celebrated Scotch angler, was very severe in his condemnation of "bushy" flies, and those dressed for his own use were very light—often but one or two turns of hackle and a short, thin body. These were, of course, wet flies, and I have often seen old anglers in this country use a sharp knife to cut down wings and thin out hackles on shop flies, with good results. I remember one of these saying to me, after this had been done: "You will see that they will take this better." The fly was not pretty, as nearly all the hackle had been removed, but he was quite successful with it. I imagined that the trout had been feeding on the larvæ, or nymph, and not upon fully developed insects.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

When the trout are feeding freely and have their attention concentrated on *one* species of insect, all of the same colour and size, they may fail to recognise an imperfect imitation as a fly. Again, they will accept any one of a number of patterns, and possibly quite unlike the natural fly that is on the water. There is no rule, and this makes the game of fishing all the more interesting. Where artificial fly only has been used one may fish after many anglers and lose little or nothing by it, or if desirable one may fish over the same water several times. When living on the stream and able to fish at will one should rest satisfied with a small kill. It is only the larger trout, after all, that are exciting and make history, and we must remember the enormous number of anglers whose opportunities are limited. No one can object if one of these brings in a fine creel. I sympathise particularly with the man who is devoted to the sport, yet has but a week or two to give to it, often during the worst portion of the season.

In insects the colours are always pure and delicate, sometimes brilliant, but for the most part subdued in tone. I always think of them as "natural" colours, and some of them are very difficult to imitate successfully. One may turn over much material, of many sorts, yet not find what is desired. I have had a great deal of trouble in bleaching dark feathers in order to dye them light colours. I wish that I could have had a few lessons from Holland, formerly of Winchester, as he seemed to be a master of this, and also of dyeing to shade. I have not heard of this man for several years, but still have a box of his flies, bought many years ago. He was certainly an artist, and was, I believe, the first to dress all of Mr. Halford's patterns.





## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

I have seen so many Whirling Duns that I made a little collection from a number of dressers. All were presumed to be the same. We all know the old dressing in Ronalds', but now we have a fine assortment of Whirling Duns to chose from, and I think I have seen four different dressings from the same shop. The Wickham is always with us, yet even this varies a bit, and I fancy that one dressing of this fly, when I can get just the feathers for it, is more killing than any other. The fact is that a man who dresses his own flies will always have more faith in them than they perhaps deserve.

I had a lot of flies dressed to one of my patterns and could do nothing with them because the hackle was not *exactly* like the ones I had used. I had no faith and probably fished them poorly. Dubbing bodices are popular in this country, and no one has any difficulty in floating flies so dressed; but there is one fly that puzzles me when it is used as a floater. This is the Royal Coachman, which I have always considered one of the "lures." There is no use talking about it—trout do not see things just as we do. To see a Royal Coachman floating on quiet water is quite remarkable. It is so frightfully conspicuous that it should scare the fish, yet one frequently hears of success with it.

We have many dun-coloured insects, not all of which are ephemeridæ by any means, and I do not think I ever tied a natural-appearing fly of this colour that was useless. I am quite sure that some of the perlidæ and trichoptera are not annuals. For instance, a caddis fly had been superabundant, and I had nothing that matched the peculiar colour of the wings, yet knew of a feather that would do so. I had the greatest difficulty in finding this, and the season after procuring it the natural fly did not hatch or develop. I saw none near the water during the season, but caught two or three specimens in September. The American Grannom has been a very important fly one year and of little value the next.

The extraordinary rapidity with which insects hatch is at times astonishing. It is very puzzling when the fly is a large one, as in the case of an ephemera something like a large yellow mayfly. I stood directly above a run about 4 ft. deep when this fly was coming up, and to

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

me it looked as if the insect rose with its wing erect and floated downstream at once.

This fly was a great favourite with the trout, but I have not for several years been on the stream where they were plentiful. I fear that they are gone, as no angler has mentioned them recently. It seems to me that the appearance of all sorts of flies is becoming more irregular and uncertain in this part of our country. I feel inclined to go on a still hunt for a region where big streams are not so changeable.

I hear now of great sport with big rainbow and brown trout in several States, and the distance is no great matter nowadays, when a thousand miles may be done in twenty-four hours by one of the fast expresses.

The Au Sable, in Michigan, is fishing very well, as it now enjoys a special law which limits anglers to the use of the artificial fly. Consequently there are lots of trout for everyone, and some large fish are killed.

Such a law as this would be of great benefit to all trout streams, but one fears to injure men who have little time for fishing, and who fancy that fly-fishing is difficult, and that they can succeed only with bait. It is encouraging to know that many wonderfully accomplished bait-fishers have given up the practice and use only artificial flies, but there are others who are never content unless they try every method to increase their catch to large proportions.

Many of the spawning-grounds and nurseries for young trout have been destroyed by floods, and I am afraid that but a small proportion of naturally bred fry grow to maturity. The State hatcheries are well managed, and an immense quantity of fry and fingerlings are distributed annually. If these are well handled there is not great difficulty in keeping up the stock of trout in free water, but no one should be too greedy during the (usually short) time when large numbers may be easily taken. Upon occasion it appears as if every fish in the river was feeding freely, and is not very particular as to the fly offered. Yet, suddenly, if there is a great hatch of one insect, the common patterns in use become of no value. One must have the colour and approximate size of the fly on the water to take trout that are rising everywhere.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

This makes interesting fishing, and adds greatly to one's feeling of satisfaction if one succeeds in killing a few good trout. Then casting to rising trout is more exciting than fishing likely places, particularly if one can see the fish.

When small perlidæ are about one will often find the fish in shallow water among the stones near the shore. We have also taken many trout rising over a sandy bottom in water only a few inches in depth. However, it may be necessary to lose sight of the fish in order that they may not see you. The light in the morning is, I fancy, decidedly the best; so much depends upon the position of the sun. There is a short period late in the afternoon, or just after sunset, when the water is smooth and oily, when it is difficult to deceive the fish, and fly and casting-line appear coarse and crude in our own eyes.

### COLORED LEADERS

F. S.

FEBRUARY 5,  
1915

THROUGH THE ATTENTION of Dr. Breck, a manufacturer sent me a sample of a peculiarly colored leader, with some remarks on his system of coloring gut. I could not judge of the colors from one, so sent for three or four more. This gentleman manufactures nothing but these special leaders and claims to use only the very best gut that can be bought. He is very strong in faith in his theories, which are roughly something like the following: It is most important that the leader should harmonize and agree with the surroundings. If the sky is intensely blue and sun bright and warm, then the sky-blue leader is indicated. If there is much green grass and moss along the stream, a pale green one. The favorite color, however, which meets the needs of the angler is orange, none dark but shading from medium to light orange. This is on many days almost invisible to the fish. There is a whole lot to the business but the above covers the ground sufficiently for practical purposes. I messed with the leaders but I was so accustomed to something very different that I could not bring myself to use them for the finest dry-fly works. It is almost impossible not to cherish small prejudices when one has been fishing with the fly all of his life (nearly). I wish the colored-leader man well.

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

### AN AMERICAN LARK

F. G.  
FEBRUARY 6,  
1915

I ENCLOSE A skin from a widely distributed American bird that may interest you. It was sent to me by a Southern man who did not know that larks were common in the North from April to November. It is the meadow lark, known in the South as the old field lark. It is a handsome bird, with brilliant yellow breast and nicely marked plumage in the best specimens, the striking points about it being the big strong beak and immensely long toes (as in all the larks), and is larger than your skylark. It has a clear, sweet note, which is particularly pleasing in early spring, and is abundant wherever there are great tracts of meadow and grazing land. A few pairs may be found breeding in the valleys of this mountain region, but they take their departure early in the autumn. The quill feathers make good wings for small flies, but the lark, being insectivorous, is now protected at all times. Formerly it was shot and eaten by many persons, and was the favourite game of the small boy sportsman. It rises somewhat after the manner of a young grouse, flying straight and steadily until under full headway, then sailing on stiffened wings for short distances. I have seen prairie chickens (pinnated grouse) fly in much the same way early in the season. The meadow lark has a wide distribution in the United States. I have seen these birds all the way from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, and from the Atlantic to the Mississippi, and I believe they are found farther west. Judging by its numbers and size, this bird must be of great service to agriculture, consuming quantities of insects. The strong bill is a perfect tool for digging grubs. Years ago I sometimes used the breast feathers as hackles for a small yellow-legged wet fly, but they were weak. I have not had any feathers since the lark was protected in nearly all the Northern States at all seasons of the year.

[I am glad to have the skin. The American lark is a handsomer and rather larger bird than ours, but as far as song goes I believe ours could give his cousin points galore and still win easily. I shall try some of the yellow breast feathers for hackle for the Yellow-leg Dun, though they are a bit soft; also I think the wing feathers may furnish a very

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

fine wing for the Iron Blue. There are a few white feathers in the tail which will make a delicate Coachman wing.—R. B. M.]

### DEATH OF MR. CHARLES F. ORVIS, OF VERMONT

F. G. [I WAS SORRY to hear from Mr. Theodore Gordon  
APRIL 17, 1915 of the death of a famous American angler and fishing  
tackle maker, Mr. Charles F. Orvis, of Manchester,  
Vermont.—R. B. M.]

Mr. Charles F. Orvis, father of Mrs. Mary Orvis Marbury, died on March 26, 1915. He was a fine old man, and until within two years quite active. He was an old-time Vermont Jeffersonian Democrat, and loved to discuss politics with you. I paid two visits at his residence in Manchester many years ago, and had a delightful time, with some very fair trout-fishing. Now it is better, as brown trout have got in and there are much larger fish. Good dry-fly water.

[In November, 1883, Mr. Charles F. Orvis sent to me with his compliments a charming little compilation made by him and his and my friend the late A. Nelson Cheney, entitled "Fishing with the Fly: Sketches by Lovers of the Art, with Illustrations of Standard Flies. Collected by Charles F. Orvis and A. Nelson Cheney." The articles are by well-known American and British anglers, including Charles Hallock, Geo. Dawson, Fred Mather, W. David Tomlin, Seth Green, W. C. Prime, R. B. Roosevelt, Dr. James A. Henshall, A. Nelson Cheney, etc. There is a chapter of practical suggestions from his long angling experience by Mr. Orvis himself; the work is illustrated with pictures of standard American salmon and trout flies excellently reproduced in colour, and these formed the basis on which Mr. Orvis's daughter afterwards wrote her fine work on "Favourite Flies and their Histories," which must always be a classic among angling books.—R. B. M.]



## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

### A LITTLE TALK ABOUT FISH HOOKS

*(Not previously published)*

During the last five or six years I have spent a good deal of time and some money in the study of rods and hooks, particularly the latter, as they are in some respects the most important of the anglers' weapons.

The old-fashioned tapered shank hook was sold at a low price, even the best of them, and were often defective in temper, barb or point. I have suffered from poor hooks in the past, and have a lively recollection of the summer when all the hooks I had bought from a well-known and reliable house proved treacherous. On one day of misery I lost four big trout through the hooks breaking. They were nearly as brittle as glass.

When the cra of eyed hooks began there was a large increase in the cost, and usually, a corresponding improvement in quality. But they did not take hold at once, as our fishermen seemed loath to abandon the gut snell with its loop and easy method of attachment. We began with Mr. Pennell's turned down eyed hooks and until they were imitated cheaply they were very good. We used these for dry fly, and snelled tapered Sproats, for wet fly, for many years. Yet we still had our troubles, particularly in those hooks intended for the finest fly fishing. It seemed to us that even in the standard makes and bends there were constant changes, and no two manufacturers made hooks of the same name exactly alike, or had the same system of numbering their sizes. There are of course two scales, the Kendal and the Reddich, but the sizes did not always conform strictly to either of these. . . .

Now it is probable that anglers will continue to have their favorite bends, and swear by them. They have had a great day, we will say, when using snecks, and ever afterwards their flies must be dressed on Sneck bend hooks. They will use no other. I sympathize with this, as anything that begets confidence is a help. I have gone into the subject of hooks entirely without prejudice, and I really think

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

that I have learned something worth while. I think that I can now rest satisfied with my hooks.

For small flies the Hall upturned eyed hook, as manufactured by Hutchinson & Son, of Kendal, is hard to beat, and a very handsome fly may be dressed upon it. It is peculiarly a hook for floating flies. For wet flies a good Sproat or round bend is usually recommended, but snecks seem to work all right in spite of the side rake.

Next we come to perhaps the highest quality hook I have experience of. This is the Modele Perfect of S. Allcock & Co. of Reddich. It was originally manufactured, I understand, to a French pattern, for the finest roach fishing in France, with a very short shank, but was improved, eyed and made suitable for flies. I have found these hooks to be of the very highest quality; the barbs are excellent and the points of needle-like sharpness. The tempering, I know, is extremely well done, as for three years I have been using special fine wires which I imported. They have endured all the tests of hard work on our mountain streams, in my hands and in those of my friends.

Since these special hooks were first made, I am told there has been a steady demand of them. They have wide bends and a pronounced twist to one side and have proved excellent hookers. It has occurred to me that for floating flies *exclusively*, this side rake in a hook with such width across the bend, and such perfect barbs and points, was unnecessary, and that it might create a tendency to make the fly float more or less on one side. (I take great pains tying flies to "cock" readily.) So I wrote to the manufacturers after receiving the first lot of Specials and they made no difficulties in omitting the twist when desired. I have had a few made to order in the same fine wires, but I fancy that they carry the Regular wires without sneck in stock, for those who prefer them.

The Halls eyed hooks were developed by Mr. H. S. Hall, president of the English Fly Fishers Club, in the years following 1882, with the assistance of suggestions from some of the best dry-fly men in Great Britain. They were intended for floating flies only, but in this country have done good work fished wet. I do not know that all fishermen will be greatly interested in the subject of hooks for flies, but to me it seems a very important matter, well worthy of a little

## THE NOTES OF THEODORE GORDON

attention. There is a vast difference between a well made and tempered hook by a well known manufacturer, which is true to pattern, and a large number of hooks sold under the same names, but known to the trade as "seconds," I understand. I have suffered enough from poor quality hooks in the past, and have had great fish at the last moment, when completely done, roll over and break the brittle things.

The hooks I refer to in this article are good to hook the trout in the first instance, and to hang onto them after they have been hooked.

For my own use I prefer the Halls turn up eyed, and the Modele Perfect turned down eyed. . . .

The length of shank has a great influence upon the size of the fly. You may dress quite a big fly on a long shanked hook with small bend, and a comparatively small one on a short shank.

It is best usually to have our tools in proportion. One can tie a handsome fly on a well proportioned hook but not on a freak. I have known amateur fly dressers who broke off a bit of the shank of their "Regular" hooks before tying their flies. They fancied that they were getting a big hook inside a small fly. This sort of thing has its natural limits and will be rejected by all men who have eyes for grace and good form. . . .









P A R T I I

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*THE LETTERS of*  
*THEODORE GORDON*

TO G. E. M. SKUES, GUY JENKINS AND ROY STEENROD

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## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

(a) To G. E. M. Skues (England)

*ONE COULD HARDLY hope for more than these messages from one supreme fly-fisherman to another across the sea. It is doubtful whether fly-fishing thought has been more finely drawn anywhere in angling literature.*

Neversink, Jan. 21, 1905  
Sullivan Co., N. Y.

MY DEAR SIR:

Your letter of Dec. 23rd . . . has been forwarded to me from West Haverstraw, and was received with much pleasure.

We labor under many disadvantages over here in getting good materials for fly making, and if we fish in many parts of the country must carry about a great mass of stuff. In one region gorgeous fancy flies of large size may be required, in another small imitations of natural insects. I prefer the latter. Fortunately for us, we do not often find midge flies necessary. Occasionally they are very useful, but on many hard-fished streams in the middle states hooks many sizes larger than those in use on your chalk streams may be used to good advantage. Many of the spring flies are large.

It is true that we have many tiny flies of various species, but the trout usually take the larger naturals freely if out in numbers. There is one queer fly that I am anxious to know well but had never been on the streams early enough. I have only seen it heavily on once, when the females were laying their eggs. The natives claim that this fly goes through three transformations, is freely taken in the first two but never as perfect insects. Certainly none was touched when I saw them, and they were most tempting as they were constantly being carried down with wings fluttering, owing to clumsiness in depositing eggs upon the surface.

Just now I am in a bad way for flat gold and silver tinsel and strong gold and silver wire. All that I have is rusted as I have been too busy for three years past to think of making many flies. If you could send me some of each kind wound on cards (for large flies, about size of this common sproat), small quantities would probably come through all right by mail promptly.

For some years I got good stuff from a man named Bainbridge at

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

Eton, but of recent years nearly all importations have been disappointing. Of course they were not of great importance. Do you have trouble in getting Condor and Adjutant quills? I have been looking for something larger and stronger than peacock, a quill showing a rib. I fancy horsehair dyed various colors would be good, have only used it for black gnats. Have never gone into dyeing. I fancy that you would find much of the fishing over here disappointing, but we have plenty of brown trout now. . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, March 4, 1906  
Sullivan Co., N. Y.

MY DEAR SIR:

I know that you would not understand the varied fishing conditions over here. On the big mountain streams, very small flies are quite useless for the larger brown trout. In the first place they would not be noticed, in the second, you would be beaten every time. You might as well fish for large Thames trout with 000 hooks and Holland's cobweb drawn gut. The fishing in the big limestone streams would suit you better. They are slow flowing and full of moss or weed, which again, is full of larvæ, snails, shrimp, etc. There the flies can hardly be too small. Here on the Neversink where the river is enormous when in spate, since the advent of the brown or yellow trout, large flies do best, particularly in spring. The coarse sprot I sent you will not break. The beautiful fine Hall's eyed are n.g. I have lost 3 out of 4 large fish by breaking of these fine wires. Personally I use Pennell eyed, except when fishing wet with a drop fly. In the spring you must fish more after the style of salmon fishing in miniature. Later you can fish dry on the big pools. Only 7 miles away is a stream of different character where very pretty dry-fly fishing has been done for the past 10 years. They have fought against the brown trout there and kept them out. The stream is not big and rough like this. I had a lot of Holland's floaters there one summer and my brother fishermen were eager for them. They killed well when the ordinary flies were useless. Now-a-days Halford's patterns are imported in considerable numbers. In the Neversink casting lines tested up to 8 pounds dead weight have been broken by the trout, when fishing

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

with minnow. I never use bait myself, so my only choice of getting one of the big fellows is to use large flies on the pools. I hooked one 6 lbs. 11 ounces, but the hook was inside the mouth and his terrible teeth soon chafed the gut through. He was poached with a big net soon after; I saw his head.

Trout in chalk or limestone streams are heavier for length, and have not the ferocity and strength of trout living in a river which at times is a wild torrent. Then they stem a frightful stream. They feed on the multitude of minnows, also are fond of a large stick case worm or caddis. The case may be 2 inches long and the fish take the whole for the sake of the fat larva. For three years I have been hard worked and had to content myself with a day or two on the stream most easily and quickly got at, the lower Esopus. This river would easily hold 30 pound salmon; the wading is awful, and even a 3 pound fish may take you down through long rapids a long distance, nearly breaking your neck and getting stockings full of water. A man in Oregon sent me huge flies on hooks  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 inches long and said they were the only thing for big rainbows. Another in California sent me a lot of English-tied duns, spinners, etc., small. These he said were best for rainbows. The country is vast and there are all sorts and conditions of trout fishing.

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, April 12, 1906  
Sullivan Co., N. Y.

MY DEAR SIR:

Your letter of the 5th inst. certainly made good weather of it and lost no time on the way. Englishmen write very distinctly and neatly but I cannot read the name of your home. You have been very kind; sorry I made any conditions to trouble you. I have been curious in re—"Tups Indispensable" for a long time from Val Conson's [Skues'] letters in F. G. [*Fishing Gazette*—Ed.] and would like much to have a pattern with the materials for making copies. I might enlarge it a trifle, although many flies do not endure this process advantageously. I sent an old correspondent a reminder last winter in shape of some rough drawings of flies, with two artificials, one at top and other at

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

bottom of sheet. One was a honey dun quill gnat on oo hook. He was enormously taken with this and begged me to make him a few on #10 (5) hook. I could not find any feather suitable for wings. At last I remembered that I had one pair of English jay wings. This answered as well as anything. I suppose the change from small eyed hook to large hook on gut altered the "expression" of the gnat.

Thanks for salmon hackles. They will come in sometime. Early in March I sent Hardy Bros. quite a large order. . . . I am very anxious about it. You see, I promised to tie a case of small salmon and large lake flies for a club, standards to be used as an ornament and guide to correct dressings in getting flies. Nearly all the dealers vary the dressings. No two are alike. I have given it up for the present. Too much delay [in obtaining materials abroad.—Ed.]. I wrote first to many on your side who sell materials for flies, in January. All were very slow. I never heard from any of them except Hardy until recently, yet I sent money to pay for samples in every letter. I will go on now until I can tie the well known standard salmon flies used on this side. Fifteen years ago I had a complete though small outfit and could copy almost anything. It is the trout flies for this part of the country that I care most about. I want many good things. If you saw the enormous box now sitting near me, piled high with big and little boxes, bags, cases and half full of long envelopes, you would say, the man is crazy. He has an avalanche of stuff. But so much of this is trash or poor. I do not dare to throw anything away. I may have to use some of it, just as recently I had to use tinsel from Irish linen, which I got when a boy of 12 years. Of course it is poor and tarnished, but what could I do? Yet at the same time I had nearly a pound of big salmon oval, broad flat silver, weak thread gold and silver, etc., etc., all no good for present use and never likely to be used much.

I have a little of some beautiful things, a honey dun cock's neck, dark blue and light blue cock's hackles, etc., but I have thousands and thousands of hackles that I buy to throw in the fire.

What you do not appear to realize is that a man who really knows a little and may fish in many parts of the country should have everything that you have and also a great many materials for larger

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

flies. Those flies of mine are not Mayflies. They are spinners; the original was a small fly. I gave a dealer in N. Y. a pattern and he has sold great numbers of them for several years. It has been dressed as big as a salmon fly for use in Maine lakes. I call it the Golden Brown Spinner, but it is usually known as the Gordon. When dressing it small I make it so that it can be used wet or dry. It cocks very well even without splitting wings, as any fly will do if hackled right, dry fly fashion.

A friend of mine took a 14 pound salmon on a dry fly tied like a Coachman but dry fly style on a big Pennell hook. The line was slack, he broke his rod in striking the fish and was a long time killing it. This was on Restigouche and he got two more, a grilse and a small salmon in the same way out of same pools in three days. I may be able to use whiter hackles; cannot see well at night. I bought a lot of flies from him years ago to give to farmer friends. They liked them pretty well. If I had not thought that Bainbridge of Eton was dead, I would probably have got the salmon fly and other stuff from him. He used to send me things that were quite perfect, and was prompt and careful. He took the greatest pains to satisfy me at that time (1890-1893) and would fill an order for a lot of little things as carefully as for an order in which there was a large profit.

I want to make you up a little package of things to try, some few I know you can use, but I have been so busy, writing enough letters for a big business and making flies for the opening. At a dinner two years ago I promised to make a great many flies and I have been working at it. I was unable to do it before. Too much business, and I found that if I dressed flies at night after a hard day it knocked me out. I am much annoyed at non-arrival of Hardy's last catalogue. It has fine illustrations of all Mr. Halford's new flies, and many others, in colors. Mr. Halford was so kind many years ago that he sent me a lot of flies of his own tying. They have proved a great treasure and are always at hand. It is 1:30 A.M. and I must turn in.

THEODORE GORDON

P.S. I wish that Val Conson would go on with his notes on fly dressing and kindred subjects. I have taken a great fancy to that gentleman and have saved a good many of his articles. I have never

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

been lured before earlier than mid-June. Many years ago a farmer friend used to write, saying "if you were here for the spring fishing you would see lots of flies." I got him to send me naturals in alcohol and some of the flies dressed after them killed well. I fear, however, that there is little fly now-a-days compared with old times. I saw scarcely any in September and October and rising fish were rare.

On some of the big pools you would enjoy yourself, if the trout behaved as the natives used to do. They lay along the precipitous side (opposite) and took every fly that floated over there. In those days I used small flies, but there was no chance of hooking a monster. Why the natives did not grow larger is a mystery. There is lots of food and the same trout has been taken in Maine up to 12 pounds. Have you read Capt. Hart-Davis' "Chat on Angling"? He speaks of killing three salmon (up to 17 pounds) on oo gold ribbed Hare's Ear. I wish I knew his hook maker. The Hall's eyed hooks I had some years ago were very brittle and on one occasion I lost three out of four fish by hooks breaking; none of those trout would have gone over 1½ pounds, I am sure. A friend of mine sent me three dozen eyed hooks this week with a re-turned eye turned down. They are Sproat bend and just right in the curve. In fact, they appear to be first rate. Why the d-d have hook makers such a fondness for dumpy hooks? I hate a hook all bend and no shank, and some day I shall try to have a hook made to order. I presume that one would have to order at least 5000.

The season opens on Monday next. Today, April 14th, is lovely yet only two days since ground was covered with snow. The river is very big, but if this weather holds will fall considerably. It looks like a fine salmon river now. For years now it has fallen very low in summer. I can remember when even at the lowest it was a hard matter to get across anywhere. Fishing now one has to be careful. Several men have been drowned in past years.

The Orvis flies (Mrs. Marbury) are very strong and carefully made, but none of my friends use them. They are heavy and tied on stout gut. Fine bass and big lake flies. Mrs. Marbury is a delightful woman. I have not seen her for years. I had a letter from a duck hunter a day or two since saying that he would send me all the feathers he had collected. Several years ago I tried to make him understand



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

something beyond wood-duck and he may have struck something good in other birds than ducks, but it was a great nuisance getting rid of the feathers for him. I bought all I could but there is no established price and the only thing that there was much demand for was wood-duck; people were crazy for them. I fear this duck will soon be extinct. Write me about your fishing when you feel like it, particularly when you have great sport with dry fly. That is very fascinating. Mr. Marston says that he will send me a Hardy Houghton if he can pick one up. Have long wished for a typical dry fly rod by one of our best makers, preferably Hardy.

Neversink, May 2, 1906  
Sullivan Co., N. Y.

MY DEAR SIR:

I have been "knocked out" by going fishing too early but hope soon to be at it again. The sun was so bright the end of last week that I ventured forth in the afternoon. The locals said it was no use as the trout would not rise in the river while any snow water remained, but by fishing with a thing I call a larva (steel blue hackle, muskrat fur, flat and round tinsel and ibis tag) a few fish were killed, 13 in all, 9 brown or yellow trout and 4 lovely natives . . . I have an idea that among our wild ducks there may be found feathers that would be good for some shades of the Mayfly. Think I have seen them. Some of the small birds may afford good shades for your duns . . .

Cordially yours

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, Sullivan Co., N. Y.  
May 7, 1906

MY DEAR SIR:

I have had a pleasant hour with your letter and the various treasures enclosed therewith. You can form no idea of our poverty in hackles. I am the only amateur I know who has any pretensions to having a stock of dun hackles, and they have cost me much trouble and time, the few I had, including all that I have imported. I received samples of dyed duns recently that are excellent, if the colors are really fast . . .

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

I would like to have you try the following. Body plain quill, peacock, light color, hackles and tail, light blue hackle, wings wood duck plain, mottled from a good sized finely mottled feather, using double strips for each side the stern. I usually varnish the foundation to strengthen the quill. It is a light blue quill, with wood-duck wings and I will gamble on it killing, if dressed to suit the water, also try same fly with dubbing of pale blue (dun) wool. This fly has been killing wherever I have used it, and is now doing great execution on the Beaverkill . . .

Killed 14 trout, best fish  $2\frac{1}{2}$ - $1\frac{1}{4}$ - $1-1$  lb.-10 brown trout, 4 natives (Fontinalis.) The  $2\frac{1}{2}$  lb. was a lovely golden yellow trout and put up a good fight in the big stream then running. There was yet snow water in the river, not a natural hatching. Trout would only rise at a thing I call a larva. Something like a hackle gold ribbed Hare's Ear with an ibis tag. I like Tups very much. It strongly resembles a fly that was popular with friends of mine many years ago. In that case, mixing red seal's fur with the wool gave the transparent, glistening effect. The fly was tied with a good light badger hackle.

Yes, I do hope Mr. Marston will strike a good Hardy. My old Hardy is leaden now. If Leonard made a top as thick as that he would put it in a heavy salmon rod and it would be much stiffer. I wish you could have cast with my old Leonard before a careless servant crushed the point. It was simply fascinating to use the old thing. Before you knew it you could be casting twice the length of line necessary, just for the pleasure of doing it. It was 10 foot  $\frac{6}{4}$  oz. rod made of extremely light stiff bamboo. A new top was entirely too heavy for the old butt and middle. It is over 20 years old and the ferules are worn quite loose.

"Cast thy bread upon the waters and it shall be returned unto thee after many days." How delightful to find you at last. You and Mr. Halford have been my piscatorial gods for many years. Soon after "Floating Flies" and "Dry Fly Fishing" came out, I wrote to thank him for the pleasure these books had given me. He very kindly answered my letter and sent me a great many patterns of dry flies. You can imagine how I have treasured these flies and how very useful they have been. To Mr. R. B. Marston I am indebted for many favors. God

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

doubtless could have made a better strawberry, but doubtless he never did. He could have made a better man but he never did. I would send you a rather long article of mine that appeared in *Forest & Stream* week before last, but it was poor enough stuff to begin with, then they sent proofs too late to be returned in time. Mr. Grinnell was ill and the manager away, so the thing was badly cut and badly hashed. We intended to divide the article into two "Letters from a Recluse" but they crammed most of it into one issue. Why is it that the "brown" trout in these waters like such big flies? When the streams were alive with native trout, we used small flies, could hardly get them too small, although there were always a good many large naturals. But natural flies do not hatch out as they formerly did. I attribute this not only to the horrible floods caused by cutting down the forests, but to the long drouths in summer and high temperature of the water. Formerly the hottest day in summer you experienced a distinct chill in stepping into the water without stockings. Now, sometimes the water is as warm as the air.

Faithfully your pupil,

THEODORE GORDON

Have received copy of Hardy catalogue. Greatly disappointed. The salmon flies were so perfect last year that I expected similar work on dry and wet flies. I do hope that I can do something for you over here. It would give me great pleasure. The package of materials has not arrived ordered March 1st, shipped April 5th. It is too cold to work so I have been hunting everywhere for a feather for one pattern of Mayfly. I find many odd things but not that. This may amuse you. How easy it is to find things you do not want.

Neversink, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

May 15, 1906

MY DEAR SIR:

The sample of dubbing for "Tups Indispensable" has arrived. It is certainly beautiful stuff. I must try to make up something resembling it before I take any out of the wad. I fancy that seal's fur would answer as substitute for the indispensable tup. The fishing has become much more interesting here as the natural flies are at last hatching and in respectable numbers. Last Saturday afternoon I saw the

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

first really good hatch. A very small (for this river) dark dun, something after the style of an iron blue, very dark wings, dark dun body turning to a dull orange on the belly. The rise of this fly completely knocked out the many fishermen who lined the river, as their coarse large flies were brought into contrast with this little fairy fly sailing down the water. I had a small quill that would have been first rate if the wings had not been far too light. However, it answered to some extent as I killed 8 trout, returning a number as too small. No trout over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a pound were taking the natural. Not big enough probably to tempt the big fish. I was much annoyed by strangers, who, doing nothing themselves, came back to watch me. One man wished to buy flies, so I referred him to Mills, to whom I gave some patterns.

Again today, after our early dinner, two sorts of flies were hatching. A rather large light colored dun and a flat winged light yellow fly with almost white wings. Unfortunately I forgot the little bottle of alcohol and anyway could not catch the dun. It was blown upstream by the gusts of wind from the S.W. The blue quill with summer-duck wings killed well fished dry. It floats beautifully. First I fished a piece of water wet, with a long line, then sat down and smoked while resting the water and spotting the rising fish. In one half stream, half pool, I had only one rise at the wet fly but killed three fine fish with dry fly fished upstream. I was out from 2 to 5 o'clock and killed a lively dish of trout,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  brace, 6 brown or yellow trout and 3 fine natives. The last were the best I have seen this year. Does this kind of thing bore you? I like it and wish if you ever have time you would write me of your own sport.

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, Sullivan Co., N. Y.  
May 17, 1906

MY DEAR SIR:

I bought some heap of paper at the country store, one mile from here, this afternoon and found your letter of the 5th inst. at the Post Office. The Mayfly is lovely, a perfect little gem. Sometime when you think of it I wish you would send me a pattern of the gold ribbed Hare's Ear. A floating fly, not for wet fly work.

The reason I hackle my flies as I do is that they may be fished dry

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

if required to float, as is very often the case. I tie some of them with two hackles. In practice it is found that those flies kill well fished wet. It is easy to cut out some of the hackle if thought desirable. I tie on wings in several ways, but I think those you mention were tied by the method explained in a previous letter, i.e., double strips of summer duck feathers set well up. The blue quill with summer duck wings is a grand fly here when duns are hatching. I hope you will try it dressed of size for your water. The effect of split wings is far less than is usually supposed. When properly hackled Mayflies cock beautifully with these solid wings or double strip wings. Sometimes I tie them concave side out but the wings do not look as well. Whole feathers do not look or work well on duns. If I had the materials I would dress some Mayflies with double strip wings and beg someone to try them in England. I have no doubt that they would kill well. Friends of mine are very anxious to have me dress large lake or Maine trout flies after my way of making stream flies. Last winter I tied five dozen for a friend, for use in Maine and Canada. They were tied in various ways but several members of a club saw them and they have been crazy to have flies dressed in the same manner ever since. I read somewhere of a salmon taking a dry "Jock Scot" but have one case in my own knowledge when a salmon rose and was killed with dry fly . . . [See page 44 for story and dressing.—Ed.]

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, Sullivan Co.

May 20, 1906

MY DEAR SIR:

Mills devotes more attention to the finer sort of flies than most of the tackle shops do over here. He has some of Mr. Halford's patterns tied large and imitates my style of fly making in some of my patterns. He is a nice man (the older Mills) and recently sent me the fourth edition of "Dry Fly Fishing." I have the original edition bought in New York when the book came out at 50 cent on the shilling. That was before the midnight receivership of the Georgia Central Railroad, which practically ruined your humble servant and thousands of better men and women. A greater outrage was never perpetrated upon a

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

solvent corporation. The only leg it had to stand upon was the State law prohibiting the purchase or lease of one railroad by another, when the result might tend to lessen or defeat competition . . .

I do not hear of any of the really big brown trout that were formerly quite common in this river. Yesterday a guide told me he killed a trout 22 inches long the day before. This is the largest I have heard of this season. My two best fish were  $2\frac{1}{2}$  and  $2\frac{1}{4}$  pounds and I have seen no others as large as this even . . .

The G. B. S. (Gordon) has been killing splendidly, fished dry, on the Beaverkill . . . I am tired of Pennell down eyed. The eye is too small usually to put the gut through twice and if one uses really fine gut as I do the jam knot is uncertain, not to be relied upon unless the gut nearly fills the eye of the hook. I do not tie flies rapidly and hate to lose them needlessly, particularly when friends are so anxious to have my handiwork to fish with. Flytying is not only interesting in itself, but brings one much interesting correspondence, but we have not so many men who take a great interest in it as you have in England . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

May 22, 1906

MY DEAR SIR:

Your starling wings were a great help yesterday. I sent a little Christmas greeting to a friend of mine, one of our senators, last winter. It had some absurd sketches of natural flies upon it and at top and bottom were two artificial midge flies. One of these was a honey dun quill gnat and my friend was so taken with it that he begged me to tie him a few, enlarged for fishing the Beaverkill. By paying 25 cents per dozen I got some really beautiful sproats and yesterday tied the flies. I tried every feather I could think of, with poor results, until I used your starling wings, then the fly looked right. I used two hackles, a small blue dun behind the honey dun to make up for the small amount of blue on the honey dun hackles. This will certainly kill well . . .

THEODORE GORDON

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Neversink, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

May 27, 1906

MY DEAR SIR:

. . . We use lots of hackle over here on small salmon and large lake flies. My flies for stream fishing are also heavily hackled . . . Mills sold a great many of the Gordon Fly (G. B. Spinner) . . . Why is it you cannot kill with Floating March Brown just as you do with the May Fly? Trout in mountain streams are queer. Fancy them allowing quantities of nice little yellow flies to pass over them yet taking duns which they were only getting at the rate of about four per hour. Sometimes they will have nothing to do with a dry fly, again they take it most confidently. Sometimes they refuse the tail fly and will only take the dropper dapped or skipped on the water. I do not like that, yet I took a 2¼ lb. trout that way. He stuck his head out of water to take the fly . . .

Dry fly is being more and more used in this part of the country, but it does not pay unless a good [lot] of fish are rising. Yet it is sometimes interesting to take in some of the smart little beggars which have been fished over by half a dozen men with wet flies without success . . . I am very lonely tonight and am writing you for the feeling of companionship. Next month I expect to have my mother with me. We will spend the summer on the Beaverkill at a very pleasant house, six miles from the railroad . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Beaverkill P. O., Sullivan Co., N. Y.

July 29, 1906

MY DEAR SIR:

. . . Snag Proof arctics are much like ordinary brogues, but made of heavy rubber and fasten with a buckle. I had mine soled with leather and hobnailed at Liberty . . .

There are very few naturals on the water now and these small, except the big stone fly, which is always about in small numbers, when water is not too warm. After the recent freshet, I went out to spot trout. I can make them run at a Bumblepuppy. They won't take it but it is great fun and I spot all their lies. I moved 8 good trout (2

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

really large) in a bit of water not over 20 yards long, yet on quite a fine stretch there seemed to be nothing but small native trout. The only rise now is in the evening. I am sorry to say that I left a fly in the biggest trout Friday evening. From working night and day by electric light one year in Wall Street, my sight is much impaired and sometimes I do not see the fly or rise of the trout until too late . . . Glad to hear that you had realized the usefulness of Summer duck for Spinners. I have always used it and found it wonderfully effective. Some little time ago I saw some Red Spinners dressed with this feather by W. Cummins of Bishop Auckland. His people tie pretty wet flies. Recently I found a box containing many dozens of flies from Holland, Red Spinners, Red Hulls, Duns of all kinds, Sedges of all sorts, etc., etc. I thought that I had either used or given away these flies years ago. What lovely hackles he uses. How the dickens does he wing his flies? Apparently they are tied down with one turn and cut short (the butts I mean). The wax he uses must have wonderful binding power. When I am in a hurry or lazy, I make the body of fly first. It is easier and quicker than winging first of all, but not so good.

The naturals from which the G. B. S. (Gordon) was tied came on in May. My first imitation with brown body and spoon bill wings I thought closer to nature, but the fly is a great killer in May and June. Some people use it all the season. I prefer the *Quill Gordon*, a wonderful killer for these waters, particularly if fished dry. I have great difficulty in getting quills and hackles pale (light) enough for this season of the year. I gave one to Murray Davidson, who fishing with an expert angler who only creeled one fish, killed 19 trout one evening off a bit of water that usually produces not over two fish. Everyone I have given it to has had great sport with it. I tie a kind of sroat gnat (much the same fly) which kills big fish well. They suck it in. With ordinary split wings, in order to get the best side of the feathers outside, I tie them on concave side in, then split and secure in position with figure of eight whipping. This is a little more trouble but looks better. As an imitation of a floating dun, nothing can be better than the solid upright wing. The wing of a natural dun is not parted as it floats. It appears like one wing. I have used some of the yellow stuff you sent for bodies of flies, a little of the woodcock and jay but most



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

of all of the starling wings, which have seemed more natural. I wish I had some of the young starling pale colored feathers. The jay is very nice. Your "Gold Ribbed Hare's Ear" is much like a Wickham with hare's fur legs. I prefer the ribs to show well. Have never been satisfied with the fur I used but Bruce LeRoy reports great success with two or three patterns of this fly I sent to him. Two small caddis flies are much in evidence at this season, pale yellow and pale green bodies. I send you the best feathers from a bluebird a clergyman got for me. Bainbridge says it is the best of all birds for "Iron Blue" wings.

Pardon this scratchy letter. My lonely days are over (9 months) and my correspondence has rapidly dwindled away. While I was alone I made everyone write to me, whether they wished to do so or not.

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

Sept. 3, 1906

MY DEAR SIR:

. . . I would like to see a past master of the art of dry fly fishing at work on one of our streams. At times there are heavy rises of natural flies and I know a number of men who use dry fly a great deal. One can use larger flies than in England . . .

It is not advisable to use smaller hooks than are required for success. I lost many trout at one time from indulging in a fad for very small artificials.

Since brown trout have become numerous, larger flies have been used by many of my friends. The big fish will sometimes take a big pattern when a smaller one will not be noticed. A great many English and Scotch flies are imported and Mr. Halford's patterns are advertised by one shop, but a great many coarse flies are sold. In wild regions and on the lakes many gaudy, fat and heavily hackled patterns are successfully employed, but not so enormous as were formerly popular. I will try to send you a few stream flies. It has been so intensely cold that I have had to tie flies without a vise, sitting over a stove and I am not accustomed to working in that way. Slow. Then I have had great trouble in trying to make good wax. If soft enough to use it, it quickly became greasy . . .

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

To get the color required I often use very poor materials, hackles, for instance. I tie my flies usually dry fly fashion and they are very popular among my friends for fishing wet as well as dry. I do not split the wings if they are to be used wet, but they will cock and float nearly as well as when split . . .

THEODORE GORDON

On the Beaverkill  
Sept. 17, 1906

MY DEAR SIR:

. . . The fishing in Normandy must be first rate. Did you ever read a work by a celebrated Scotch statesman called "Life in Normandy"? It is one of the most delightful books I ever read. I found it in the Georgia Historical library. Very few people in America have read it, yet it is a wonderfully interesting production. Such powers of observation and description and such a fine style . . .

It is wild and lively up there [12 miles upstream]; a noble pool under a high fall must hold some immense brown trout. A brown trout was killed two years ago that weighed 6½ pounds above the fall on the Fentinch's water . . .

There are a good many chub in the lower reaches of the Beaverkill and they sometimes annoyed me greatly. I used Hall's eyed hooks #1 all summer. This is not a large fly yet the chub took it very freely. One evening I went to fish for a four pound trout which was lying below the wooden bridge near here. I found a number of people fishing, so fished above for a time and lost a very fine trout which ran into the sunken branches of a water-logged tree that I did not see. Then I tried for the big one below for a long time. At last had a fine rise just when I had seen one a minute before. I thought surely I had the big fellow but it turned out to be a regular buster of a chub . . .

It is surprising what big flies trout sometimes take. A friend sent me a Wickham's Fancy that was dressed on a long #8 hook. He said that it was good on high water where he fished . . .

Many trout have gone upstream, others lie like logs on the bottom or under cover of rocks and stones. Yet one sees a good many in posi-

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

tion, apparently ready to feed. Now and then there is a rise but since the middle of July it has been all midging . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

October 6, 1906

MY DEAR SIR:

I am always glad to have a line from you. "Life in Normandy" has a sub title, I forget it exactly, but it is something like Studies of French Fishing, Politics, Religion, Cooking, etc. This gives you no idea of the work. It is the man himself. His wonderful powers of observation, description, etc. Another man going to the same places and over the same ground would have seen little or nothing worth writing about and very few could have compiled two thick volumes. Another book, "The Cruise of the Marchesa," is delightful. In writing the log of the cruise, all well known countries and places are skipped. Even Japan is left out. There is a great deal about unknown islands of the Eastern seas or South Pacific. The description of the far Northeastern coast of Asia. The rivers so crowded with migratory salmonidae that they are almost solid fish. Near some of them the number of salmon and trout forced ashore is so great that one can smell their decaying carcasses four miles away. This is not fishing you know. Our season in N. Y. closed on September 1st, but went on to October 1st in Maine. The air and water in N. W. Maine were too warm up to the 23rd of Sept. for the trout and salmon to take well and friends of mine were greatly disappointed. I sent one of them all kinds of combinations to try to tempt the fish, but it was not much use. When I could fish no longer, I turned my attention to studying the trout and fancy that I learned something. I found several places, where from a high bank I could watch the movements of the fish from day to day. For one thing, they are frequently in places where we never think of fishing and I am sure that one scares lots of good fish without knowing it. In a long shallow pool which I called the pig pen pool, I thought that only two trout had spent the summer. In fact there were seven good fish, one about 1½ pounds which had been under a rock so long that he was perfectly black. He lay under that rock like a dead thing but

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

was lively enough when disturbed. Another fish of about the same size was a beauty and an arrant wanderer, here, there and everywhere. If full of grub he amused himself by tormenting the minnows in shallow water, without eating them . . .

. . . Dr. Henshall answered my queries in regard to grayling and states many thousands of fry and ova have been distributed, mostly to state hatcheries, I believe. Some have come east, but I do not know of any public waters in which they have been placed . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.  
March 1, 1908

DEAR MR. "CONSON":

. . . I tied a few duns last year with quill body and honey dun hackle which I thought a fair imitation. A friend on the Beaverkill on a cold day when the rise came on about one o'clock identified this fly with the one on the water and in a short time killed 16 large trout. No one else could do any good at all. This was on a club water. So many friends send me Plymouth Rock hackles that some years ago I tried to work them up into something useful and turned out a peacock's body fly which I now see is after the style of the Francis' Fancy fly. I gave three to a friend of mine and he returned one with the hook broken saying that he had had success with it, used wet. I had not used it for 15 years but intend to try it dry on #1 hook. It would show up in the evening.

I was glad to read "Chalk Stream Studies" again. Would it not be interesting to try his methods and big flies now? Do you think it would be very good? It is hard work getting about in the snow but I love to get up on one of the heights from which I can see, far across this broken country, mountains, hills and valleys. It is very beautiful on a clear bright day in winter. We will soon be able to fish once more but I fear that it will be a poor season. My farmer friend and I have been trying to breed good dun hackles but the cocks are turning out poorly.

THEODORE GORDON

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Big Indian, Ulster County, N. Y.  
May, 1908

MY DEAR SIR:

For a year or more I have been out of it. My mother had a bad case of neurasthenia and would have no other attendant or nurse than myself. This will explain my silence as I was not in a position to write or think of much else. However—she is well placed now and content and I am free to brace up, fish and regain my health, which has been impaired.

My fly making materials are in a chaotic state but interest will revive. I have not tied a fly in a year . . .

There are many fishermen and too much fishing at night, with large flies. This makes the large trout very shy in the day time. Fishing with large flies after dark is poor sport. I do not care, now that I am getting to be elderly, to fish anyhow and anyway to get trout, and these men spoil the dry fly water. However, we will not complain. It is a privilege to be in the country and upon two trout streams. When I am really fit for work will move to a greater distance from railroads over the mountains into the next valley.

THEODORE GORDON

Beaverkill  
September 3, 1908

DEAR MR. SKUES:

. . . This morning I got specimens of dark red spinners, Jenny Spinners, most perfect blue duns (the tints of body and wings were exquisite). A peculiar yellowish spinner with brown markings, lace wings and long tail. The strangest fly of all was a big brown spinner, very stout, body looked as if it had been plated and varnished. Wings crinkled glass. First pair of legs very dark brown, the other four a queer light fawn color. Tail nearly white, two stiff spikes twice as long as the body . . .

THEODORE GORDON

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.  
December 30, 1908

MY DEAR SIR:

A few years ago I could have directed you to the kind of trout fishing that I fancy you prefer. Now it is much more uncertain. The tremendous freshets which move vast quantities of stones and gravel, have almost destroyed the natural flies on some of the large streams. The stocking with *fontinalis* and neglect of *fario* have (with minnow fishing early in the season on the free portions) caused a great falling off in average size of the trout in this part of the country. And, for some years, I have not been much more than 100 miles from it.

I found a blue cock of the year yesterday and hope that I will succeed in buying the bird. He is rather large and I fear has but a few small hackles, but the neck is of a lovely color. I have not seen anything as good in 5 years. There is no duty on natural feathers, I am told. I always pay duties on this side of the water. If you could give someone a shilling to pull out the wing feathers carefully, it would reduce the bulk greatly and a nice lot of starling feathers could be sent in a large envelope. Otherwise only a few pairs of wings could be sent at a time. A large package seems to make the Custom House people suspicious of something they do not understand. Three years ago I imported a quantity of additional material for salmon flies. I wished to tie fifty or sixty of the best and most beautiful standard patterns to be mounted in a case to hang on the wall. The hackles required had been carefully dyed in England but the Custom House evidently did not know what they were. They were taken out, fussed with and were lost or blew away. I never got them. Three months of waiting and trouble for nothing, I was out of pocket about \$30 and could not tie the flies. Restrictive laws of all sorts are multiplying rapidly in this country and you are making a beginning in England. Free trade is delightful and logically would seem to be the best policy, but the subject is a difficult one. Protection seems to be essential in a new country.

Many of our game birds are of little service in trout flies. My great trouble is to make people understand what is required. I know many birds of excellent plumage for certain flies, but when they have their

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

habitat 500 to 3000 miles away, it is not easy to get them. When we traveled a great deal and came North only in the summer, I had a remarkable collection of feathers but did not consider it necessary at the time to have much of any one thing. By the way, have you seen a good account of the "Battle of the Sea of Japan" by a naval officer, a qualified authority, with diagrams of the tactical evolutions, if possible?

It is curious that I have not been able to find this. I have a fair report by the Captain of the Sevastopol (Battle Ship) of the battle of August 10th 1904. I secured a remarkable record of the war on land in the form of large photographs taken by war correspondents in the field, but the book is very unwieldy and cumbersome. I should be very glad of a copy of the *Field* containing your article. What is the price of subscription? Formerly I read the *Field* regularly at the Club. It is expensive, I believe. I usually find interesting and amusing matter in any of the English or Scottish sporting periodicals that I have occasionally seen. It is very wintry up here at this season, quantities of snow with excellent sleighing.

I wish that you would try and experiment with chalk stream trout. Take two snow white feathers, brown breast of wild duck, as small as you can find of good shape and tie Mayfly fashion on almost any body, peacock herl, for instance, or make a small white moth, say #1 hook. Occasionally this fly has a curious effect on the largest trout. They savage it as it touches the water. Of course, it can be made to float like a hay stack.

This letter is becoming an epistle. It is a dreary day. I shall make flies this afternoon if I can get my correspondence in shape this morning. Good luck to you in 1909.

THEODORE GORDON

P.S. Do you ever get a chance to buy old fashioned tinsel epaulets?

Liberty, N. Y.

January 16, 1909

DEAR MR. SKUES:

. . . How do you wing your flies now? In order to clear the eye, I separate the waste ends and tie back under the hook, then cut off. Holland has some way of avoiding this, I see by dissecting his flies.

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

Don't see how he cuts ends so close on up-eyed hooks. The slips of feather come away cut clean and very short. I think I am in the way of getting some of the big brown curlew. They are lovely feathers for sedges, etc . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, N. Y.

January 30, 1909

DEAR SIR:

In building wings I find it much easier to place the slips, after they are cut or torn from the quill, upon my knee. Adopted this plan some years ago . . . Would you care for some very pretty wood duck bars?

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, N. Y.

January 31, 1909

MY DEAR SIR:

You are most fortunate in having a great market, Lcadenhall, within reach. It is not only the securing of required materials, but the pleasure of the hunt or chase. Washington Market in New York was at one time a haunt of mine, but my best collecting ground was the old-fashioned brick market in Savannah, Georgia.

The hackle enclosed is very fine. When I do find a cock of good colors he is apt to be large and coarse. I have tried everywhere to get a good stock of hackles for my pet flies, but it is not possible. I thought that Mr. Marston might be in a position to procure anything in that line, but have come to the conclusion that if we are to have good duns of the pale or light colored shades we must breed.

In Georgia I think that fairly good fighting game birds may be had at \$15.00 for a cock and two hens. The hackles are blue badger but blue hens can be picked up occasionally and by putting the game cock to them birds of good color might be had . . .

Protective duties are certainly a great nuisance, but I fear that we shall never have free trade. The tendency in most countries is quite the other way. . . .



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

I received some mottled widgeon feathers recently that I fancy may prove useful. Was disappointed in the feathers of the cinnamon teal. The side feathers are brown (light) but not mottled.

I wish that you could drop in this afternoon so that you could examine the mass of stuff I have collected. Possibly you might find something useful. No. 1 or No. 14 is quite the best shaped eyed hook I have, much superior to either the 12 or 16. It has a fine point, small barb and good shank. If the people in this part of the county would restock with brown trout, we would have far better sport, but they have gone back to the native brook trout. The water in the large streams becomes too warm for these char. *Fario* grow rapidly. In fact they thrive exceedingly.

After much anxiety my mother improved in health and returned to S. Orange last week. Loneliness may explain the length of this letter.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.  
February 10, 1909

DEAR MR. SKUES:

. . . When tying flies to gut (and the same method is much used on turned down eyed hooks) the old fashioned way was very useful. The flies were quite pretty, too. I refer to the method of making the body first, then tying on wings. When wings have been secured with three turns of the silk, bring same behind them and tie in stem of hackle, turn hackle, bring silk through turns and pass in front of wings, whip finish and then cut off refuse ends. A fly tied in this way floats well and I was struck by the good appearance of some old ones I found recently. With a fine wired sproat hook to gut I remember that flies tied with cock's hackles floated extremely well.

I have been trying for a curlew in several states, and hope that I may get one. Our marsh hen or dapper rail affords good feathers for wings and the salt marshes are full of these birds, yet if you are not prepared to go for them yourself, you will find it difficult to secure a pair of wings. Off here in the interior of New York one is in a very poor position. If friends were not so good natured, I would get very

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

little. The trouble is that they do not know what is good or most desirable.

Many anglers were much dissatisfied with their sport in this section last season. What exasperates me is the stupid prejudice against the brown trout which has really been the backbone of our sport in the big streams for ten to fourteen years. But I must not get on that subject. I would fatigue you. I have had the constant care of my mother for seven months. Now that she is in South Orange with relatives, I am quite lost. The care of a sweet, cheerful woman in delicate health, is quite an occupation.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

February 18, 1909

DEAR MR. SKUES:

Thank you for the field fade and hen blackbird feathers. I think that the field fade particularly will be useful. I am sorry that you have had so much trouble about the starling wings. When I wrote I supposed that they would be unusually plentiful. Candidly I care little for Mana's writings. At times they have been rather amusing, but I fancy that he wishes to appear as a "great original." He is careless in his statements and I do not believe that I have gained any real information from him . . .

I have tried the hackles of small birds and from grouse, woodcock, snipe, etc., but rarely with much success. A brown mottled partridge hackle on a light bluish dun body, ribbed with fine silver twist was quite killing. Cock's hackles seem to work best and I have been surprised that the trout should appreciate wet flies with so much hackle on them. The cinnamon teal is found in Southern California and is a beautiful bird. The smaller side feathers might do for big cinnamon sedges.

We have a great variety of snipe, plovers, curlew and other migrating waders and I am sure that among these will be found many good duns and particularly those light shades that are often useful. Unfortunately I have not been where I could shoot or buy any of these birds for many years. When I left Savannah I had a nice little collec-

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

tion of feathers, etc., but only a little of each material, as I did not realize the difficulty I would have in procuring fresh supplies. For years I have been in love with a rod which belonged to a friend of mine and one day he said, "I do not care to sell that rod but if you will tie me all the flies I want, I will give it to you." I rose to that fly with the greatest eagerness and told him to send me a list. It came and the total was 45 dozen. (The rod cost originally \$50.00.) It was quite an old rod, but I was well repaid in the pleasure I derived from its use. Do you know that it is really hard work to tie a large number of flies? However that may be, fly making and the search for naturals have made many long days pass quickly since I came up here. Any man accustomed to an active business life must busy himself about something.

I fear that we shall have a poor season this year and do not know where to go. Several friends wish me to go back to the Esopus, which fished better than the Sullivan County streams last year.

How is it possible for Mr. Marston to handle all of his correspondence without a stenographer, and typewriter? The relief from the drudgery of driving a pen and the saving of time would be great. Most men can dictate far better than they can write. I always could, I am sure of that.

There is a good deal of fishing over here that you might not care much for, but the variety is great. I have had sport that would please anyone. Last year I cannot say much for.

THEODORE GORDON

P. S. Our salt water marsh hen or big rail has good wings for sedges. The bird is very common yet it is very difficult to get feathers. People are indifferent and the birds are not valued as food.

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

March 5, 1909

MY DEAR MR. SKUES:

. . . I have had some amusing correspondence lately. One man sent me samples of eyed "fly" hooks from one to three inches long. Some of the fishing reports are astonishing. This is a big country. I received a package from White of Omagh this morning. An interest-

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

ing collection and well worth the money, although principally articles I did not order. A rat skin, a mole skin, a squirrel skin (N.G.) and part of tail, two hare's ears, 2 packets of seal's fur, one dozen flies, one dozen hooks, one dozen partridge hackles, six dozen cock's hackles (blacks, whites, Plymouth Rock and just one dozen nice brown). The skin of the Irish mole is much thicker than that of the American mole, but color nearly the same.

From correspondence and my own experience, it seems that in some localities imitation of natural is not of much use. I get samples of the most extraordinary flies of amateur make, which are said to be good killers, yet can only be so through the life or movement of the fly.

I know one little lake full of big brown trout up to five pounds, where the fish are death on dragon flies. There are great numbers of these insects and the trout are constantly leaping for them. A friend of mine has dressed some excellent imitations, on fine long-shanked hooks. He is now on West Coast of Florida. I ordered in New York some of the Gundy "Cracker" flies for salt water fish and sent them to him this morning. It is really too cold to write. We have had a blizzard since yesterday at daylight. Snow badly drifted and roads nearly blocked. The fierce wind makes one very uncomfortable.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

March 11, 1909

MY DEAR MR. SKUES:

I mailed you a copy of "The Outers Book" yesterday. It is published in Wisconsin and is rather western in style. In a letter from a fine young fellow who is taking a post-graduate course at college he says, "When I was in the S. preserve last summer I found a number of flies that killed well in the dead low water. They appeared to be nondescripts. Can you give me the names and tell me where I can get more dressed just like them?" These flies I had tied after the small naturals I had found upon the steam in August 1907 and I am not sure that I can duplicate them from memory. However, I have been having a try at it and hope to send Guy [Jenkins?-Ed.] a few flies

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

that may be useful. I have not a great deal of time for fly making as it is necessary for me to take a great deal of exercise out of doors and I have many other duties. The hotel serves an early dinner at noon for the country people and I take my meal at that time in order to have two or three hours free before going out again.

The method you mention of tying on the wings was popular (in a modified form) many years ago. The rolled wings were tied on in that way, but the hackle was wound on behind them and they stuck out in front over the head of the fly. For a long time reversed wings (or tying Irish, as some people called it) were considered quite first-rate. They were tied in, pointing up the gut, then the butts were cut off and silk carried to the bend of hook, tail tied in and body formed. Then hackle was tied in by the point, the fibres having first been stuck on one side of the stem. It was wound in and secured. Last of all the wings were bent back and tied down with three or four turns of the waxed silk. These flies were supposed to be very strong and durable. I first learned to make flies at the age of 13 years from Norris. Body first, hackle next and wings tied on last. This, I suppose, is the oldest method of tying flies. I know that I killed many trout with my rough flies. For many years after I went into business I bought all the artificial insects that I used and might have continued to do so if I had been able to find store flies that were really tied after small American insects. Then Mr. Halford's "Floating Flies and How to Dress Them" came out and I was fortunate enough to secure one of the first copies that were imported. I learned all the methods described in that magnum opus and from that time read all the articles on fly tying that I could find. Your writings in the *Fishing Gazette* interested me greatly. In 1890-1891 I learned to tie salmon flies from an article by Mallock of Perth. In Savannah, Ga., there was a long old-fashioned market. The sort of place where one really enjoys poking about and collecting. I am afraid that all these details will bore you but I should like to have your own experience as a fly tyer in return. It has been a delightful hobby and I think that making my own flies has increased my sport very considerably. I am getting into good condition again and hope to have fair sport this spring.

THEODORE GORDON

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

March 14, 1909

MY DEAR MR. SKUES:

Yours of the 4th inst. received. The hen blackbird wings will be of use, do not doubt it. I never receive anything that has merit that does not prove its value sooner or later. My growl at English clerks was not occasioned by the trifling error, N. J. for N. Y., but was caused by a long series of annoyances. . . .

I should have been glad to write on the subject of trout flies and fly making but do not think that such articles would find many readers in this country. There are a considerable number of amateur flytyers, but comparatively few who pay much attention to the naturals. Many tie large flies for fishing in wild lakes and streams or for black bass. English anglers and a good few Americans do not allow for the vast size of the country and the great differences in the flies used, style of fishing, etc. Now-a-days I listen respectfully to statements that seem queer or absurd, as they may prove to be true enough. I have fished much from Maine west to Wisconsin and south to Florida, yet I realize that there is a whole lot that I do not know.

The most cocksure opinionated men I have met have been those whose experience was limited to one or two localities or possibly those who had only used the fly rod for a year or two.

I wish you would go for Mana. He makes me tired, although he may be an agreeable man to meet. It may be only his style, but I fancy that he knows but little. I hope that you will let me know the results of your experiments with Stewart's patterns and Webster's flies. "The Anglers and the Loop Rod" was a very entertaining book. Webster's attack on Mr. Pennell amused me immensely. I think that you have been reading "Where the Barefoot Boy Looks for Trout" in F. & S. I do not know Mr. Sherwood personally but he knows the lower Esopus well. His articles have been interesting and instructive, but apply particularly to the Esopus. It is a big stream where he fishes it. There are pools big enough to hold the largest salmon. With a good stage of water it is very fatiguing to wade and one often has to fish it much as one would proceed on a salmon river. Sherwood hardly realizes that there was practically no fly fishing on the lower Esopus

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

until rainbows were introduced and some years later brown trout put in. It becomes too much heated for natives. I have seen this stream (lower reaches) where it was full of algae in quiet places by July 1st, also bull frogs, snakes and turtles. Yet it is a ground stream in many parts and holds very large trout (up to eight pounds or better). I have taken many up to 3 pounds and cousins of mine who often fish it have killed four pounders on any flies. "Little Talks about Fly Fishing" were only a series of articles written mostly on the stream and published in F. & S. It is funny that I should have had many inquiries for them in book form and that publishers should have wished me to write a book. The things are just simple little gabbles or talks. Golly, what a letter I am writing.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

April 4, 1909

MY DEAR MR. SKUES:

Your favor of the 22nd ult. received. I will enclose a pattern of English Brown Sedge fly which has killed very well on the Neversink River in the summer months—when I tie it myself I use light brown fur from summer coat of mink or weasel, which are difficult to procure. The mink fur is usually too dark and the weasel turns white in cold weather. Have you used two small flies called beetles? The black one has ostrich herl body, black hackle and black feathers brough from head to tail and tied down flat to represent wings and back of beetle. The other has peacock herl body, dark red hackle and white feathers tied down in the same way. I had good reports on the black beetle last year when fished on the Beaverkill. I have only two, one of each; if you cannot dress from description, or do not care to, I can make patterns for you. This is a cold raw day, dark and windy . . .

Those beetles would surely kill grayling, and might be taken by trout when feeding on curses or midges, hooks 00 and 000, but I shall try them on 0 or No. 1.

When the water was high early in the spring and native anglers said that fly fishing was useless, I took some fine trout up to 2½

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

pounds on a large blue dun body, hackled from head to tail with a lovely blue hackle, small red tag, gold tipped and wound with stout gold wire—used all of the latter I had. The red tag was to attract attention and the general coloring resembled large dun colored larvæ which I found in the bed of a race, when water was shut off. I found olive larvæ (dark) and brown ones, but olive is not a common color for flies herabouts. There is a large olive in Mayfly in some northern waters, which sometimes rises in vast numbers. The variety and irregularity of appearance of the ephemera in this part of the country is surprising. Big hatches of a fly one year and none or scarcely any the next. Last year there were very few flies in Neversink. It was most disappointing, often nothing except gnats and midges all day long and few trout rising. . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, N. Y.  
April 25, 1909

DEAR MR. SKUES:

. . . They will all be dry flying this year, the wise and the foolish, the country men and the duffers from all parts. It is odd how easily led men are . . . Men send me a few enormous hackles carelessly torn from any bird and expect me to send them a few dozen flies in return. They think that we can sit down, twirl our fingers and behold! a gross of flies will appear immediately.

But oh!—that hook business. The time and money I have wasted trying to get patterns that are first rate . . . I have a perfect Hall's eyed No. 1. With well shaped, well balanced hooks, all my flies, from the smallest midge to the largest salmon or bass fly, will cock at once. That is the test. Most of them will sit on a table or on the water, but with crazy hooks and poor hackles all you can do is to give them away . . . The big streams are not fishing well as yet. I fear they will not later, but the brooks have yielded many trout. Mostly to bait fishing, which I care not for.

THEODORE GORDON



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Liberty, N. Y.

May 14, 1909

DEAR MR. SKUES:

. . . The tip of the quill from golden winged flicker when clear light yellow makes a fine transparent body for a Mayfly. I used to get a pull from the yellowest feathers near the (root) butt that made good wings for a tiny yellow caddis fly that comes on in June. It is always fluttering and skittering about on the surface when hatching at all . . .

If I had an automobile I could have a delightful time . . . I fully intended to tie some May flies after the colored illustrations I have sent to Mr. M. and yourself (just to see what my ideas are worth). I have so many interests and the days fly away so quickly that I do not carry through one half of my intentions . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

January 9th, 1910

DEAR MR. SKUES:

I have no doubt that your new work on fly fishing will find many readers in America. It is only on the large limestone streams in this country, and a few others, that have their sources in great springs that one finds conditions similar to your chalk streams. That is, in my experience, but there are, very probably, other waters where such experiences would prove of value. A great many anglers had English books on fly fishing and find profit therein. Also they are sometimes led astray when they do not make allowance for local conditions.

We should have an entomology of the insects born of trout waters. Much attention has been paid to butterflies and bugs, and the inhabitants of stagnant ponds and puddles . . .

We are having grand winter weather, such a strong crust on the snow that I walked upon it for miles yesterday, through the woods and fields. An inch of light snow on top enabled me to follow the tracks made by the animals and birds that had been out. The ruffed grouse is a much handsomer bird than the Scotch bred grouse and much larger than your partridge. Very fast on the wings, wild and wary. I

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

will send you some of the red brown feathers when I can lay my hands on them. Good luck attend you.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.  
January 15, 1910

DEAR MR. SKUES:

A friend of mine bought for me some very nice mottled summer duck but as is always the case one does not find many feathers that are suitable for small May flies. If the wings are too stiff the fly spins on the back cast and spoils the fine gut cast by twisting it . . .

Several men will look forward to your new book with pleasant anticipations. It is strange that there should be first rate anglers who do not study the refinement of the art!

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.  
February 14, 1910

DEAR MR. SKUES:

Thank you for the jay and fieldfare wings. It is curious how much birds of same species vary in size. For instance, I have a quantity of wings and pick out a right and left that appears to be the same. I will find that the feathers of one wing are much broader or wider than the other, and they may vary in color. You are fortunate in the range of flies you ordinarily require and that all or nearly all are small. Your difficulties in feathers are much less. Last May or early June naturals were only on the water for a short time each day. There might be two rises. The stream rose and a quantity of small insects with very pale wings came on about 5:30 to 6 P. M. I could not find any small feathers of sufficiently light color so was obliged to use a pull or two near roots of a canvas back or red head; feathers very coarse. The result was that these stiff split wings on a No. 1 hook made the fly spin on the back cast and my fine gut casts were soon ruined. Minnow fishing plays the devil on some of the free water over here. I have often seen the trout put down when rising freely, not to come on again for hours. We have had an extraordinary quantity of snow this winter. There

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

are great ramparts and drifts of it and the roads are in a pretty bad way. It is beautiful in its purity. I wish that you had seen some of the woodlands after the ice storm in January. There was a good crust on the snow and I could get about anywhere.

I am still fussing with hooks. Have thousands on hand. I find nothing better than Hall's eyed, when they are well made, but for wet fly a straight sproat makes the prettiest fly. I have some feathers which may be good for your March browns and sedges, which were sent to me by a Western sportsman. Will send a few for your opinion when I find them again. A former friend bred a cock that he thought was blue and the hackles are really good this season, but are steadily becoming darker in color. Why is it so difficult to find good peacock moons for quills? I rarely get one good moon out of dozens of feathers. Large strong quills, not too dark; several years ago all that I had were useful. Twice I have imported moons. Last year from Herefordshire. . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

March 14, 1910

DEAR MR. SKUES:

When I used to shoot or buy wood duck myself there was never any difficulty in getting just the feathers I wanted, but the men who get them now in the sections where wild fowl are abundant put all sorts of useless down and useless stuff in a package. I know that you use the smallest mottled feathers for Mays, but these are only found close to the small whitish or half mottled ones.

Years ago a good angler and flytyer worked out all the well known English patterns with the feathers of American birds and materials. He used the feathers from the robin, a migrating thrush, a good deal, but I consider these inferior to starling. The bird is now protected in many states, all the year. Bainbridge stated that the bluebird was good for iron blues, but he is mistaken.

Winter again today. Much snow in the country still. During a ride yesterday I saw a few bluebirds, the first harbingers of spring, and robins have been reported. One day is much like another. What vic-

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

tims of habit we become. I write for two hours, tramp in the country two hours, lunch, tie flies, tramp again and read all the evening. As a matter of fact one rarely knows the day of the week.

I glance over the book reviews and publishers' lists but cannot find your one volume on fly fishing. I may decide to send over for Halford's and can order yours at the same time.

I wonder if Mr. F. W. H. will have anything really new in the way of instruction, new ideas, or methods—that is, improved methods of manipulation? Holland has a new way of making all flies with detached bodies and they are using hackle tips more for wings. Nothing new. I used hackle tips in 1890.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, N. Y.

March 29, 1910

DEAR MR. SKUES:

What do you think of these inside feathers? I have used them occasionally and think that they are mentioned in some of the older dressings of duns.

Carshallton cocktail was winged with teal, wing on inside of teal. Why should upstream fishing with one fly to bulging, midging, minnowing or tailing trout be infra dig on a dry fly water? It was practical before the dry fly and only went out when the latter was thought to be never killing.

THEODORE GORDON

On Neversink, via mail route

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

February, 1911

DEAR MR. SKUES:

I read your diary of a week on Itchen again last night. This sort of thing is worth while. It is interesting, as most original observations are, and brings the actual fishing and surroundings before an angler. I find the ruffed grouse wild and badly scattered. Wear myself out to get a few shots (mostly damned poor ones). Am saving a tail from one of the brown tailed birds for you. The best wings for small flies have the

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

fibres nearly at right angles to stem. Take a feather from a large bird and even if fine enough and you strip a wide section the ends are apt to make a narrow wing . . . The river is in spate and presents a fine appearance but the great floods have played the devil with much good water, also with the larvæ of flies. You still have your grayling fishing with small fly. I did something with black bass in September and the last afternoon had a curious experience with an enormous brown trout; what the fish was doing there I know not but it certainly put up a great fight. The season was over, so it had to be returned, though in finest condition . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Big Indian, Ulster Co., N. Y.

August 19, 1911

DEAR MR. SKUES:

I received a letter from Iowa containing references to your last book and 8 samples of your wet flies for chalk stream fishing. These were, of course, ordered in England. The "Tup" is not very good, hackle too dark and dubbing too red, with a trace of yellow at the tail end of body. In the main, however, they are very well made on oo hooks and the gut is fine and strong. My correspondent fishes in Wisconsin and seems to have found an excellent stream which is abundantly supplied with insect life. Several of the ephemera are very large (I received a collection of flies in alcohol), whacking big browns with mottled wings and what appears to be a species of dark mayfly, a regular buster in size.

I have not seen Mr. Halford's recent work and am thinking of sending for a copy, although I am offered the loan of the book to read. I understand that he is strong on quills and horsehair. Where I have been able to get the latter of the color I wish, round and glossy, it seemed to give good results. A pale yellow dun was very good.

It is curious that for several years I have had trouble in getting good strong quills of a light color. Most of the peacock quills are very dark. Formerly I had no such difficulties.

The long drought has played the devil here. In fact between dry

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

weather at one season and great floods at another a number of streams which have high narrow watersheds are almost ruined.

I never saw night fishing carried to such an extreme, and some large trout up to 24 inches long have been killed. I regret not having moved across the divide into the next country the first of this month. The evening fishing is very short and as for going on after dark, it is not real sport. The trout cannot see you and have not a fair chance. It is disappointing not to have any naturals to work on during the day. A pattern of dark red brown sedge by Holland on hook about No. 2 or 3 killed well one evening. Formerly there were multitudes of these caddis flies, in varying shades of brown; often the colors were very delicate and pretty.

. . . It is only occasionally that I find a small cock with fine hackles of useful colors. If I could find a rocky stretch of river where the small mouth black bass feed upon insects, I would go there for September.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

January 3, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

. . . I kept a good many ruffed grouse feathers. My idea was that the tails of hen birds might serve for marsh, brown August dun, or possibly sedge. The cock's tails are more gray than brown. But the fibres do not grow at (nearly) a right angle to the stem. They are long and slant much toward the point. I was interested in your method of dressing nymphs and they should kill well a times. We have been having much talk of dry fly. Much of it due to men of no practical experience who have gained their ideas from others and books. Why didn't they take it up when there was an abundance of natural flies? I know a number of men who are real artists and have fished dry for many years. I began myself in 1890, and remember making little addresses at angling club dinners at least 15 years ago, when asked to talk of dry fly fishing . . .

My materials (everything in fact) are in a mess. Must have a good

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

filing system. My mother's illness and so much moving about have created confusion and I have stuff in storage in various places.

Do you keep a diary of your fishing? If so, it must be most interesting and valuable to you. Also you could write most interesting articles by refreshing your memory from it . . .

THEODORE GORDON

P. S. I intended to shoot one of the bright or light red squirrels but forgot to do it. I saved one hare's skin that was unusually pretty, also a weasel changing from summer to winter coat (ermine) and a good light gray squirrel. A pair of wings for iron blues and June grannon. Good color but rather soft. Shot a very large porcupine in a tree and sent it to be carefully skinned. Those thousands of quills are interesting. Collecting becomes more and more difficult. Nothing for sale in the markets now-a-days, game or birds. Poultry all of the great coarse breeds. Have not seen a good badger hackle in several years. Will sort out small summer duck. They came to me in a mess, all sorts of feathers from the birds mixed.

Liberty, N. Y.

January 6, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

. . . The weasel in part summer coat makes a nice shade dun body. Gray squirrel very dark. Both might be worked up into a form of gold ribbed Hare's Ear . . .

Very truly yours,

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

February 3, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

Thank you for the hackles; they will help me out. The pale blue cockerel hackles would be useful on small hooks, No. 1 or 0 and perhaps up to about No. 3. It is very difficult to find small hackles that are good for anything. The mixture of big breeds has played the devil with poultry in country districts. A friend of mine does a little dry fly fishing every year, always with the same fly, one of my patterns with quill body. I have a dozen in a little box ready for him. He takes a few days late in May or early June and enjoys himself greatly.

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

The summer coat of weasel makes a pretty rough body, a sort of blue dun with brown shade. Have been trying to match it with a suitable hackle.

The robin is protected all the year now, but I never found that bird very useful. Cannot hold a candle to the starling (English). The robin wing is very dark. The ruffed grouse is so powerful and rapid on the wing that naturally its feathers are very strong and the primary wing feathers are reinforced, one may say, as are those of many wild ducks. You know what I mean.

I struck a few gingers of good color but very coarse midrib. I think I told you of my troubles when a bright little caddis fly was on the water three years ago. How I finally tied a pale Wickham, pale dun wings, and two palest buff or ginger hackles. This seemed to give the effect of the little buzzing caddis on the water, though in the hand quite unlike it.

There are a few feathers on a bittern that make first rate wings for the alder fly, although rather soft. I shot one of these birds woodcock shooting many years ago.

The old English breed of peacock is the bird one wants for quills. I did not understand but it seems that for some years there have been enormous importations of feathers from Spain and China. These are from the dark birds known as "green," while the English is the "blue" breed. It is this Asiatic breed that makes it so difficult to find light colored quills. A good gray or blue quill is now quite a treasure.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

February 8, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

Thank you very much for the hackles. Even when I get the color I wish for, the hackles usually have thick obstinate midribs. A farmer in Iowa (over 1,000 miles west) who has to go 600 miles to a stream in Wisconsin, has been using dry fly for several years and says that most of the anglers fishing the same water use the dry fly. He prefers the flies he makes himself, but sends a couple of Mr. Halford's recent patterns, tied by Hardy Bros. He had your wet fly patterns last year. Would not small feathers from butt or inside of wing of a number of



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

birds be useful for your nymphs? I have used them a good deal. Often because it was the only way I could get the color to suit the body.

That little vise looks like a good thing. If it is put on sale anywhere please let me know. I formerly used only my fingers; did not take to a vise until about 1890.

Have had a number of vises and think that Halford's was as good as any. I mean the original vise illustrated in his first book.

I have had two patterns of a big "Evening Dun" sent to me. *Looks like a moth*. Body, bluish dun from a fox, wings pale grayish dun, double. Looks like teal. Hackle, yellowish very pale dun, tail same. I have reduced the size to No. 1 hook and like the looks of it.

The small fly I imitated in 1908 or 1909 has proved very killing last week in May and first week in June. All dark blue dun, except eggs, which are orange. I suspect it to be one of our grannons. There is a larger fly much like it later in June, but without the orange eggs. Several streams have comparatively little insect life now. Others hold up well in that respect.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

February 25, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

One of those small envelopes contains the best badger hackles I have seen for a long time. Some years ago I was passing a poultry store in New York and saw a cock's neck hanging up. It was a beauty and I stopped to admire. The shopman came out and said, "That is pretty—is it not? You can have it if you care for it." That neck not only gave me many small flies but I used the larger ones for the most useful bass flies I have ever had. I fancy that the quill of the yellow-hammer used as one would a section of straw would make a good May fly body . . .

The editor of one of our best periodicals makes and dresses beautiful tapered fly lines, dressed under the air pump.

In re that fly with "Tup" (on near "Tup") body and dun wings, it was sent to me under a fancy name, "Newport Folly." The body

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

was a fair imitation of the Tup, legs not bad, but the wings were from one of the little dark blue herons. The fly was well dressed, I must say . . .

I sent a present of flies to a native fisherman and he brought me a dark blue cock's neck. The small hackles are useless, smutty and soft, while the big useless ones are good blue. It seems too bad when one considers how rarely one finds a cock with blue dun hackles. I wished for a new rod this year, but felt that it would be an extravagance . . .

Our woodcock has pretty mottled feathers for wet flies. It is a smaller bird than the European woodcock and, in good condition, weighs 8 to 10 ounces. The female is much larger than the male.

Thank you for those hackles.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

March 10, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

The teal feather is from the wing, the largest being used for that large evening dun. This may be the same feather that was used for winging the Carshallton Cocktail. You remember a popular fly in the Wandle many years ago, but most duck feathers are too heavy and coarse. It is curious that the finest, most transparent of the duck wing feathers should be found on the canvas-back and red head and quite small in size. The former is a very large duck, quite 1½ pounds, heavier than a wild drake or mallard.

It is most difficult to get small hackles for duns and spinners. . . . I got some blues from the west last week but they are all too large to be of any service, except possibly for big night flies, which I hate.

There is of course a whole lot in the dressings of nymphs. Most of those I have collected were brown, olive, grayish and orange. There are a good many very curious larvæ in mountain streams and I cannot imagine what several of them hatch into as flies.

The three big books I got in January are worthless to us; only one poor mayfly picture and a short page on caddis. Thousands of land flies, bugs, grasshoppers and such stuff, showing an enormous

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

amount of work and devotion to the study. If I can find some robin feathers I think you will see why I do not care much for the color. Many years ago an expert angler formulated many of Ronalds' patterns with robin feathers, but I cannot think that they could have been very successful as imitations, although they may have killed well enough. The vagaries of trout are endless. I know a man who has imported the best patterns from England, yet always fishes dry fly with rough flies of his own tying or with local patterns. I remember a very small fly with mouse colored body and gray partridge hackle that killed well on slow streams, fished wet. I found a few feathers under a wing of the American bittern that made a fine wing for the alder fly, but there are only a few of these feathers, which are a bit soft. The bustard feather is free of oil as you can easily see by using a magnifying glass.

I will try my hand at the nymphs. Think I would use quills for  $\frac{1}{2}$  or  $\frac{2}{3}$  of body if I had the correct colors. That new-skin idea is fine but I do not think that it would work well over seal's fur. One has to use poor stuff sometimes to get results. There is a very pale sort of mayfly on some waters in June and I never could get the peculiar color of the body in anything except pale yellow wool, fleecce, I think, the stores call it. Last year a good man told me it had hatched out with a much darker wing and body unchanged, which seems queer. The ice has not gone out yet, but things look well as there is so much snow in the woods.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

March 17, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

Your favor of the 6th instant received. I do not think that you can realize my appreciation of a present of decent hackles of almost any color. This country is wretched collecting ground now-a-days. Twenty years ago one could find good reds, cocky bondhu and furnace hackles, without great difficulty . . . Yesterday I received a small box filled with hackles (or feathers) from a friend of mine who has a strain of Rhode Island Reds and nearly all of them had to go into the

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

waste paper basket. I doubt if these cocks would be of much use, in any event. They are so big and coarse, but the peculiar color may be useful for something; possibly the hens might afford good wings for large sedges or "Welshman's Britton." Of course, you can be more particular than I in regard to hackles, as you have a far better collecting ground. Your account of the abundance of good reds and gingers makes me a little envious.

The American woodcock is a peculiarly beautiful bird but a little chap compared to the European bird, 10 oz. is about the limit for females and mostly they weigh less . . .

I liked your patterns of wet flies for chalk streams and have some of them. I also have a few of Mr. Halford's latest patterns. He seems entirely wedded to quills and hair, except for Mayflies. After waiting for some weeks I received his "Modern Development of the Dry Fly" yesterday . . .

I like quills for dry flies but could not do without dubbing of many sorts. Mr. H. seems to be down upon all the old favorites, particularly the fancy patterns. In regard to these—I fancy that there is usually a good reason why the trout take them. Of course, when you enter the field of movement, brilliant coloring and flashing bodies, that is entering another field. Several of the "Fancies" present a very life-like and natural appearance upon the water, when fished dry.

What do you think of this latest book? I profited more by the "Dry Fly Entomology" although many of our insects are queer. For instance, I found a number of small flies like dirty or dull Jenny spinners and watched them for 24 hours. They proved to be *duns* and changed into bright glassy spinners, with almost transparent bodies.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, N. Y.

March 30, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

It will be very interesting work caring for and developing the fishing on three miles of neglected water. I am working with the high officials of the O. & W. Railroad in restocking the trout streams on

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

their main line, and have secured the assistance of three of the best men I know to distribute fingerlings in three watersheds of best rivers.

I have been reading Mr. Halford's "Modern Development of the Dry Fly" with considerable pleasure. The color plates will be useful but we cannot commit ourselves to horsehair and quills. Few amateurs would care to go into dyeing so extensively and I know of no firm or individual who would undertake to tie all the materials to shade. Holland [flytier—Ed.] seems to have done the heavy work in the first place.

I have used hen's feathers but they are rather coarse. However, I sent some flies to a farmer friend and he brought me a selection of feathers from his hens. Some of them may wing sedges or caddis flies successfully. There used to be a breed of small hens that had fine brown mottled feathers for the alder, etc. . . .

I have been assured by two men that they had succeeded in dyeing the shades of dun fast, in hackles. Recently one of them sent me a recipe.

I have used four hackle points for upright winged flies, with fair success . . . By using your palest badger hackle behind the best of the dark ones, I got a good effect in one spinner . . . Your nymphs should do well over here in some waters . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, N. Y.

April 9, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

I am constrained to write you this morning upon hotel paper, as something very pleasant has come to pass. Yesterday I received two beautiful Leonard rods and was informed that several angling friends had clubbed together to present me with a new rod.

One is a beautiful Catskill, 9 feet, 4¼ oz., in round aluminum case, the other a typical dry fly rod of the tournament class, 9 feet, 5¼ oz., shaped handle of good size. This last is, I believe, almost a duplicate of your little Leonard. It has tremendous power, and may require a fairly heavy line to bring it out . . . It was a lovely, gen-

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

erous act. These are hard working professional and business men, whose recreation is angling. They are not rich, and these rods are very expensive . . .

If I had fished a little in England, I would have a better understanding of your insects.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

April 24, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

After careful consideration of Mr. Halford's latest book and study of his patterns of artificial flies, I am moved to write you in regard to the latter. There is a certain mimicry or correspondence in coloring in nature, particularly in birds and insects and I believe that all the water born insects may be imitated in self-colored materials. This wholesale adoption of the dye pot (it seems to me) is objectionable and should not have been necessary. One of the chief pleasures of the angler and amateur fly dresser is in imitating the flies that the trout are taking, doing this himself. Mr. Halford seems to have been entirely dependent upon professionals in making up his new patterns. Holland and Son dyed the materials and tied the flies in the first instance and must have spent much time and labor in getting the colors and tying experimental flies. Mr. Halford himself says that it is most difficult to dye the materials to shade and that even in the big establishments, with every facility, they have trouble in getting their colors right. The less the amateur has to rely upon dyed feathers the better and his continual study of birds and the collection of materials that will enable him to successfully imitate any insect interests him the year round. He never sees a cock or bird of any kind, without observing its plumage.

I believe that in time I will have everything necessary to copy all the different colors and shades that pertain to insect life, as found upon the streams and small lakes in this country. (I have an extraordinary mess at the present time.)

I had a good dose of this dye pot business while I had a fad for making salmon flies. It was a never ending nuisance.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

The general adoption of Mr. Halford's patterns would shut out the majority of amateur flytiers from making and using their own flies for dry-fly fishing. Only a few would have time to go into the dye house business, and as for buying the materials ready dyed, just try it. I cannot even get a few peacock quills dyed to suit me.

Four years ago I spent much time on horsehair bodies and tied a few patterns that certainly looked well and seemed to be good imitations, but they did not kill as well as the same flies with dubbing bodies.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

May 4, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

Without spending some time in this country, you can have no notion of the extraordinary variety in the conditions to be met, just in trout fishing.

In some parts it is necessary to use big flies full of life and color, more after the style of Loch and Lea trout flies, in others the small imitations of the natural flies common upon those waters. In yet others, a sort of compromise system prevails, nature at one time and fancy flies at another. In visiting a strange river you may find that your flies are not good for anything.

. . . I tied a few Quill G. on No. 1 hooks. I like to have this fly with bodies (quill) and hackles of several shades and one with quill tinged with yellow. This fly serves well. I can vary them to suit. The black gnat is an old pattern of mine—jet black ostrich quill, pale blue dun wings and starling hackle; sometimes with silver tag which I fancy helps the wings.

The light Cahill does well when a pale blue is on the water and is one of the standard patterns, dark and light and dressed in several sizes. In the caddis flies, I try to have a little range of color from dark to light, with dubbing bodies of a splendid sort of ermine. I bought a lot 20 years ago but it is no longer to be had. It is like an exceedingly fine mohair.

A good dun has body of hare's fur (light) tinged with fine green

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

dubbing, medium dun wings and ginger hackles. The dark grannon is a favorite of mine, also an earlier riser and smaller, that carries a bag of orange colored eggs (dark). But there is no end to the flies and they vary so much in different parts of the country that it is very puzzling at times.

I trust that good fortune will attend you in developing the new water and that you will be well rewarded.

I surely missed the number of the F. G. containing your review of Mr. Halford's "Modern Development, etc." I miss one now and then much to my disgust . . . I am very fond of the *Fishing Gazette*. It suits me. Would like more articles after the style of your "Week on the Itchen."

I have a good many little things poked away that I wish to send to you. I am always hoping to strike something that will turn up trumps in your hands.

I believe that a vise of almost any form that suited one's convenience would be practical if it had a properly constructed screw, say with slow deep grooves and sound materials.

Amateur fly makers who have that nice gift, a mechanical turn, make their own vises out of tool steel, use them for years, for all sorts of work, from salmon flies to midges, and never have any trouble. I have known three men of this sort.

I hope to have a chance to wet a line soon. Have to be cautious this season. We have had three lovely days, but now it is overcast, raw, northeast wind.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, New York  
May 9, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

Your experience of dry-fly fishing has been more extensive and varied than that of most anglers. You have not the strong prejudices and notions, engendered by fishing only one stream, or locality.

Now, I believe that a book containing your recollections of sport in different countries, the tactics employed in suiting your methods, flies, etc., to the varying conditions found, would be extremely interesting and instructive, and be *widely read*.



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

There is a large class of anglers in America, as well as in Great Britain, who really crave this sort of thing. The time at their disposal for fishing is limited; they love to get hints and suggestions and to read of the actual sport had and strategy employed by others.

You know that my articles have been much condensed. I have feared to write at length of my own experiences, but I have been surprised by the number of letters received from anglers in many states. I wish that some first-rate man of means would establish a first-class weekly paper, devoted entirely to angling. The *Fishing Gazette* would be a good model, I think, and there would be no difficulty in inducing many expert fishermen of real experience to write for it, and to get reports from all parts of the country. Fifteen or twenty years ago I was asked to start and edit such a magazine, but I doubted my fitness and at that time there was no such wide interest in the sport; men did not read so much as they do now.

The time is now ripe, the right man with a little capital could, I feel confident, get the circulation, and that would bring the necessary advertising to support such a periodical. With a little more enterprise *Forest & Stream* might have been a second English *Field* today. The number of outdoor papers has increased rapidly during the past ten years. Write your recollections when you feel in the mood. It would be a pity to lose them.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, New York

May 26, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

I do wish that I had sent you a hook with one of these "Flicker quids" on it, just to show what I mean. Then with the wing and hackles you would select, I fancy you would have a lovely pattern of the yellower bodied May fly.

It is nearly transparent on the hook, yet shows the color through it, wet or dry. I have just returned from a day up the O. & W. RR for a few days' fishing. I had noticed the big heavy water and large flat pools below Livingston Manor, from the railroad, and fancied there might be a few big fish.

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

I got on the water by 2:30 P.M. but a severe electrical storm broke up the fishing for an hour. Then small chubs nearly drove me crazy by taking my small dry fly, and I became quite discouraged. Coming to a great flat cddy, nowhere over 5 or 6 feet deep, and 200 to 300 yards long, I squatted on a bank under the trees and watched the water. The confounded chubs were rising, but presently a few pale duns began to hatch in the broad shallow and I saw a trout rise twice. I made a wide detour to get the sun right, and attack from the other side of the water. The fish rose only at long intervals and seemed to be moving a couple of yards from side to side. At last he remained in one place, and when the fly went over him just right, I saw a nose come out of the water. The next instant the fish had gone up stream twenty yards. What an effect cold water has on the trout. It seemed as if this chap had no end of staying power. However, he was a good 18 inches.

I got only 3 brace and returned one that looked small, although quite legal. Think of basketing such trifling fish.

. . . I stopped overnight at a clean little country hotel. There was a country store at which I bought 15 flies to see what the local wet-fly men were using. Most of the gut was thick, some of the colors quite good, many were too large. May send them to Mr. Marston, although he is deluged with flies.

Sincerely yours,

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, N. Y.

June 5, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

I have just returned from two days' driving and fishing on the Neversink. Caddis flies are more plentiful this year than for many seasons past, and many sorts. Even the big stick caddis is more plentiful again, where ever it has a chance.

I collected specimens of a short, fat dun, palish-dull yellow underneath, light brownish, winged above, with peculiar wings. I have seen hackles from mixed breeds with a strain of Plymouth Rock that might answer. Grizzled brown barred. A pale ginger might answer for the

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

legs, but there are two or three darker markings, in each leg, 2 on each upper section.

Some idiot put chub above the Falls of the Neversink and they have multiplied and worked their way up into all the large pools. A perfect nuisance.

An excellent native angler sang loudly the praises of "Flights' Fancy," so I looked up an old pattern I have. Wings, light starling. Body, white or pale yellow silk (apparently it is old) ribbed flat gold. Hackle and whisk almost white. That is, a hackle with a yellow shade. Is this right? He thought that it was darker than this.

There was a storm of brownish dun caddis in the water late, from a few minutes before 7 to 7:25 in the evening, but the trout did not take them well.

I killed a few fish on a big light colored Red Spinner, with flat wings . . .

I wish I could work out a dubbing of seal's fur, mohair or pig's wool, without wool, for the "Tup." It is difficult to put [on] anything instead of a wool bodied pattern. That queer fly with dun wings, an attempt to copy the "Tup" body, has been sent to me again, as killing well.

THEODORE GORDON

June 14, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

Can it be possible that we habitually wing many of our floating flies?

Again and again when in haste or when using miserably poor feathers, I have tied up a few flies with thin, skimpy wings (and very narrow), and again and again these have not only floated well but have killed well. They are certainly not pretty, but if they give the appearance of the fly on the water and satisfy the trout on a hard fished stream, who cares for pretty wings?

I have just tied a hare's flax, ribbed with gold, to show clearly what I mean and would be glad to know your opinion. The old writers, Ogden, for instance, all seem to plump for broad wings.

One of the best native fishermen was in to see me day before yes-

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

terday. The dark grass worm had been up day before on Neversink. I never knew it to be plentiful on that stream, though I have seen extraordinary rises on the Beaverkill in June.

I was on the stream (Neversink) for a day last week. No one was doing much and the silver chubs were most annoying. I got a few fish on a large Gray Spinner with yellow eggs, quill body, horizontal dun hackle wings, and found them crammed with minnows.

I am in hopes that rafia grass will answer for the body of the Esopus, a large yellow ephemera of that stream. It has seemed impossible to find any substitute for very pale yellow wool. I tried all sorts of fur, mohair, etc.; nothing gave the body except this wool. There was a very large trout under the bridge at the village, in still water beyond the stream. No one could catch him. In the evening after dark, the landlord of the little inn said, "I have 5 minnows and I am going down to get that trout." A little later, I followed him down to the bridge. He was fishing from the far span, and presently sung out, "I've got him, I've got him." His rod was bending freely and presently he seized the line and hauled something upon the bridge. "What is it," says he. "Why, old man, you've got a fine eel." The big hook was in the eel's stomach.

THEODORE GORDON

P.S. I find several good pure dry-fly fishers quite useful in testing flies thoroughly. They are glad to get a few flies. Yellow duns turned up, and killed well when other flies were useless. I tried three shades and sent them out, after I returned to L.

This pattern with gold rib seemed to be the favorite, but this hackle is too dark. I have such difficulty in getting buff, ginger, etc.

To get wings had to resort to duck under-wing feathers, the small ones underneath.

Claryville, via Liberty, N. Y.

June, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

I may be able to get the "black" Tup wool here, as I am informed that there are many black sheep in the flocks hereabouts. I enclose

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

samples of yellow and dun wool fresh from sheep, dirty and with natural grease in it. Wish to the Lord that you had got those ginger hackle you mention. I need them so often. This country, or region, is ruined for decent small hackles. Starling is most useful, particularly the light shades. I received a fly from a friend last week, a so-called pale evening dun. I am sure he must have used it for night fishing. It was more like a battleship (or big moth) than a dun. Heavy *double* wings of light-colored duck wing, pale dun fox body, cream hackles—a great quantity, and cream whisks. Dressed on a hook *six sizes* smaller it looks a good fly, as I put the lightest dun hackles on it, starling wing, peacock herl and two good hackles (red) on a hot day, particularly when flying ants are about and no ephemera of any sort; seems to please the fish. It answers as an all around bug when the water is very low and the good trout are hidden under shelter of some sort.

The pink body fly from La B. turns a sort of red spinner color when wet, or oiled. A surprising change.

The hot weather killed the rise of ephemera; only a few small yellow and brown caddis flies in the evening . . .

Yellow is perhaps the most useful color and an appropriate color for the fly one is making is most important. Some people say not, but they use fat bodies; even then the color makes a difference. Some of the insects in spring could not be imitated decently without purple silk for tying them . . .

The clouds are obscuring the sun at intervals and a breeze has sprung up. I will try the East Branch this afternoon. Finest drawn gut, and a small yellow I killed a couple of fish with after tea Saturday, back of the house. The orange quill serves you well.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, New York  
June 20, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

It is curious how difficult it is to reproduce an effect in dubbing in any other than the same materials. In the matter of "Tup," I am impressed with the notion that for this country we had best take advantage of the idea, yet change the color scheme a very little. There

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

is a certain basis of olive from the ram's wool that is hardly needed here; probably a yellower or browner shade would be better.

I sent you a sample of experiments. Afterward I got a better "Tup" which I am told killed well in a small stream last Sunday, native trout. I gave two doctors three flies to try. They had invited me to go with them in an automobile, but it was nasty weather and I was busy.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

June 23, 1912.

DEAR MR. SKUES:

About 10 days or more ago, a native angler came in to tell me that a fly was up that I recognized as the dark grass worm. Having had my own troubles with this fly, I thought of a good friend of mine, who was then on a club water where this insect is sure to appear, if anywhere. I sent him three floating flies at once (hackles for this fly are very rare). He replied that the grass worm was hatching for about an hour, every day, but left the water instantly, when hatched, etc., therefore sport was very poor with dry fly.

I immediately tied a couple of wet flies the color of the larva or nymphs, detestable work, as the little soft hackles are miserably weak. It was evident from what he said that the trout were taking the insect on its way up to hatch, or at the instant of transformation. Well! He thanked me for the flies, and then began a discourse upon the dry fly. You would have imagined that I had assailed dry fly fishing, whereas my only wish was to help him to a bit of sport, when the floating fly was almost useless. This annoyed me.

It was only after the expenditure of much time, and with difficulty, that I collected enough feathers of the proper color for this fly. It is peculiar and very dark (and only enough for a few flies).

The yellow dun has been up, and as usual at this season, a little yellow caddis. I always have trouble in finding pale dun feathers, imitable for some of the light colored duns. Had to use inside of Red-head duck this time, the little feathers under the wings.

THEODORE GORDON

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

July 1, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

Just a few notes to show you what I am doing. The great heat has spoiled the fishing for a time . . . I am on the water, which is low, very low, but clear and sparkling. There was a heavy rise of fly for a short time on the evening of my arrival and the trout were taking them quite freely. I wasted time looking for a pattern and found a Quill G dressed with a very dark hackle. This proved to be just the thing, but in taking the first trout, a good one, hooked in roof of mouth the fine point of the hook was broken off. The fish were rising shyly and it was impossible to hook them with the fly in this condition, so was obliged to change again. A dark hare's ear with dark hackle added was the best I could do, as the natural fly was peculiar in color. I had flies too dark and flies too light, dressed to the colors of insects belonging to the same species but this was a new one on me, in shade of the color.

I have collected a few specimens. While in my room today, I felt something crawling on my neck and removed a fine male stone fly. So you see I am close to the stream. The weather has been very hot, too warm for the flies to appear, except in the evening.

A cold northeast wind sprung up last night and the water had had a chill. I saw three good fish moving in a pool that seemed deserted yesterday, so hope that there will be something doing tomorrow morning. This is Sunday and I am content to rest and potter about. It is marvelously quiet, not a sound except the song of our sparrow (song sparrow). The drought has come early this year and I fear that it will be a severe one. At 6:30 A.M. today there was not a drop of dew on grass or flower. There were showers elsewhere yesterday, none here and it was a dry wind. Monday A.M. 8 to 10 frost early, 5 trout, 2 returned. Had an hour after tea; a good fish. Tuesday fished long shallow pool. Too low for the water, killed three lovely fish. The last and largest gave great sport.

THEODORE GORDON

P.S. La Branche, a well-known dry-fly man, sent me 4 flies tied to

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

his own design of Cummins. They have pinkish bodies, dark dun wings, ginger hackle ribbed flat gold tinsel. Do not recognize the fly.

Claryville, via Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

July 10, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

The yellow dubbing is from a quantity of beautiful stuff I bought 22 years ago. Some of the most useful colors have been used up. I did not imagine that I would ever have another opportunity, but so it has been. I fancy that it is very fine wool or hair from a young goat. Never have seen anything just like it. It is fast color.

I have had a number of such experiences. The bright orange quill would kill well in this country, but I have never been able to get the quills. If one had several shades they would vastly improve several floating flies with silk bodies. Mr. LaBranche wrote to me last week enclosing 2 large, 2 smaller [sizes of] a favorite fly of his own design tied by Cummins. It is a peculiar pattern, with pinkish body. Do not recognize the fly. He writes well . . .

I see that Westley Richards is tying your nymphs. In the 1912 Itchen dry fly rod, Hardy Bros. seem to have got close to the American type. It has the old Wells handle also, which I have used for many years. One of the most entertaining things in Mr. Halford's latest work is that scene on the Itchen where his friend is killing big fish on a Tup but is persuaded to change to a Black Gnat male and creels two trout on that. He is thus brought into the true faith. It is most amusing. My idea would be not that the Black Gnat male was the best, but that the fish were so strong on the feed that they accepted it 3 to 2 in favor of the Tup is not a strong argument in favor of the new patterns.

The weather has been trying, hot as the hinges of Hades. Killed the rise of fly, except yellows in the evening. Overcast and cool today. That Newport fly, which is an evident attempt to copy the Tup body, is a great favorite with an angler I know; with the hackles used, it is not like anything in particular, but he says that he has killed lots of fish with it. Apparently he fishes it in rapid broken water. I have a suspicion, however.



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Several weeks ago in trying some flies I found a lovely hackle, a cock's of just the color for the Tup. I gave it the best body I could make and sent it to him. I have a suspicion that this fly has caused this burst of enthusiasm for the Newport. Don't think he notices the fine points in a fly or sees the great difference between a Tup and a Newport Fancy. Whenever there has been any fly I have had moderate sport with the large brown trout, not over 2½ brace, in a couple of hours.

THEODORE GORDON

Claryville, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

July 19, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

. . . If any of these quills are of service, can send more of that color. From one of the darker yellow olives, I made a green with gray Hen black-bird wing; furnace hackles (two), fine gold wire over quill body, that looks fair. That pale Evening Dun so-called, is good dressed small; with *young* starling wing it would be improved. Body light dun fox or raccoon fur, hackle pale dun with *yellowish* shade, *not* olive. Yesterday evening I was all off, and banged my fly into projecting branches that I did not see but that were in plain view. Hooked small trout which was promptly seized by another.

THEODORE GORDON

Claryville, via Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

August 17, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

There is little pleasure in writing, after one has been hard driven all day and is weary. I hope that you are fishing now. There are just a few people to whom I write whenever I fancy that I have something to say.

Any starling feathers are useful. Are Landrail easy to find? But some years ago I had a few pale young starling feathers excellent for some duns. We have trouble in finding light shades that are suitable. I received 8 more moons, 6 dyed, 2 natural, one of the last good for Quill G. Most useful fly. I sometimes fancy that wings are of little

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

consequence. I use three shades of the Q. G. and if body and legs hit off the natural, the wings of, perhaps, wrong color do not seem to count against the fly. For instance, I found a good trout taking something. Saw a quantity of flies in the air and few on water, was puzzled. Tried three flies over fish; the third a gold ribbed dark hare's ear brought the trout up but he refused it. Looked in box and found very dark Q. G. brown quill, only one I had, and offered it. It was accepted at once. *Confidentially*. Yet wings were all wrong, body and hackle about right. Same thing happened during heavy rise of dark duns June 29th. We had a big flood a week ago. Monday on a high water killed some fine fish on big red and gray spinners, flat wing (horizontal). The last with eggs at tail. The trout follow the food.

One evening could not find them in the pools, wasted time but at last found them in shallow fast water, after caddis-fly hatching. Only had time for 3 large fish. They took the fly fiercely and instantly rushed for pool 50 yards away, when struck. It was fine. Parts of this river ruined by floods. Pools filled up and only little trout in some reaches. No place left for big fish. Lovely water but I should be lower down; more deep water there.

THEODORE GORDON

On the Neversink  
Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.  
September 2, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

Our season closed in rain and cold on August 31st. I was out for many hours, but only killed nine fish, and these of no great size.

It surely is extraordinary that anglers differ so much in regard to nearly everything pertaining to the craft. This year I bought hooks of all the sorts used for dry flies, and sent them about to men I knew would be fishing, the bare hooks and also with flies dressed upon them. But it is of little use. Most anglers judge of hooks from a successful day or follow the ideas of some man who is known as a good fisher.

Some are taking to Model Perfect, others like heavy Sneek bends, Eyed "Sproats," Hall's eyed (of one sort or another, every maker has

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

his own pattern of Hall) or Long Mays. I am anxious for your opinion of the No. 1 and No. 3 form of Hall's I had made after an old pattern of No. 1 that I had used years ago. Would it be wise for the manufacturers to make them in all sizes from, say, 00-0-1-2-3-4-5? That would be 7 sizes. Do you think wire too fine for big fish? I like Hardy's Dry Fly Hook with wide bend and slight twist quite well. Last night received some *forged* Hall's cyed from a western man, who imports them. I hope that you are fishing and have better weather than this.

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink

Address Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

September 14, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

I sent for Mr. Leonard Wood's book through Westley Richards & Co. who advertised it . . .

The dubbing I sent you was to show the material which I once had in all useful colors and shades. The yellow has a slight greenish cast when wet or oiled. The green is useful. I sent another color or shade, but forget what it was. I hope that you will write that article on nymphs and also your proposed work on the principles and theories underlying imitation.

It seems to me that most men jump at conclusions, without much thought, study or great experience. In fact they do not apply the lessons they learn on the stream, even when they have had experience.

In imitating a fly if one can get the effect *on the water* and if the imitation looks good to us, it usually pleases the trout.

Sometimes one gets the effect in an odd way. I had failed to raise more than one in five of the feeding fish, in a beautiful piece of water 150 to 200 yards, and noted that they were taking a bright little caddis fly, of which there was a lot on the water; a light sort of Wickham, with pale dun wings and buff hackles was successful. Now gold seemed a queer body, yet on the water the effect was that of the natural. I returned to a large fish that had ignored all other flies and got him after a fine combat. The quantity of hackles required for dry

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

flies has an important influence. You change the shade of this and alter the whole appearance of the fly, giving it, say, an olive or yellow cast as its motif, for instance. The trout does not see the imitation through a magnifying glass. I had to test those hooks (I had made at considerable expense) very carefully. Am afraid that I sent you the first ones made in which I find several poor hooks. The form is great for hooking and holding, but the barb is not quite correct, as designed. The original was the best No. 1 Hall's eyed I ever had. I rarely fish other than flies I have dressed myself. I like to make them from day to day to suit the occasion.

I bought a variety of best hooks this year, Halls, of several makes, short and long and extra wide bends, Model Perfects, Pennell Snecks, etc., and sent them about, bare or with flies dressed on them, but learned nothing from the conflicting notions of others. They usually judge a hook by killing a lot of trout when they are feeding fiercely, and almost any hook would kill. I want the very best, and have at least reached definite conclusions. I know what is best for me and when I can get Hall's eyed as designed by Mr. Hall, find those best for small flies. Model Perfects make an ugly fly, I fancy. Horrible weather. I am still right on the stream. Have written endlessly since season closed for trout. I fooled the old potted trout at last and he smashed me after a terrific fight. He had a deep hole among rocks under bank and had to be stopped. Extraordinary strength, but he had lived in cold water and won through many fierce floods. No limestone or chalk stream trout leads such a strenuous life. I had drawn gut point that had been used too long. Fly a little *dark T. G.* [*Q. G.*?—Ed.]. You have the greyling season before you. I am to try bass again.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, N. Y.

September 20, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

As I was ordering Mr. West's new book from Westley Richards, I also sent for some of your nymphs, but received your lightly dressed flies. Greenwell's Glory, Tup, Hackle Blue Dun. They are nicely

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

dressed on fine wired hooks, but I wanted the nymphs. The Tups are very fuzzy with yellow butts (primrose). Greenwell body very dark, oval gold tinsel. The Blue Dun is very nice, but ribbed silver tinsel. Hardy's Tups are too red and white, I fancy.

How one can alter the whole complexion of a fly with darker or lighter hackles! or *spoil it entirely*, with poor ones.

The weather has been frightful, week after week. Shooting season opens Oct. 1st, but country food, solitude and bad weather are becoming wearisome. One feels depressed under constant adverse conditions and unless taking much exercise, several months of this food is a bit hard on the stomach. I hope you have good sport.

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, N. Y.

Nov. 5, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

The nymphs were bought of Woolley, one dozen. Nearly all of them olives. We have small olives in this region but they are not common. Yellow is much better represented. Most men note particularly a small active caddis fly and neglect others of more importance. The ephemerida kill better.

Mr. West's Edition DeLuxe is probably very fine, but I cannot say that I have learned anything that will be useful from the regular edition. I do not care for the illustrations. The colors do not seem natural. This is confidential. I do not care for many land flies, nor for many bugs. Have been interested in the crane flies. We seem to have a great variety but not in strong force on trout streams and the water born sort seem to prefer stagnant water . . .

I have been tying a few flies this afternoon. The colors of the natural flies are so delicate and beautiful that it is hard to please oneself. What do you think of celluloid? I have had a lot of raffia grass dyed various colors and shades.

Cordially yours,

THEODORE GORDON

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, N. Y.

November 27, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

. . . Some dry fly fishing is queer. I have seen men using a Royal Coachman on a fairly large hook. I fancy that they take trout that are in the mood to grab anything and the brilliant coloration may appeal to their curiosity. They are "lures." I have often moved large fish by playing a big lively fly. After rain many of the best trout are killed by minnow fishers with stout tackle. In fact, one loses respect for the fish sometimes. Fly-fishing only should be the rule everywhere as it is on most preserved waters.

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, N. Y.

December 9, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

I have it, at last, in the same fur I sent to you. For years I have been trying to get a gold ribbed hare's ear of a different shade and effect. I got many patterns but all were too dark or something, so I compromised on two patterns, one light, one dark. Still wanting the light effect that some insects have on the water. I want a native bird for wing, had to use jay for these first patterns.

Wings —English jay, two pulls from quills, the light dun feathers, or portions, quill feathers.

Body —Rough fur, with short hairs in it, a light brownish dun.

Legs —Slightly burred, or cuckoo hackles, or short hair from fur.

Tail —Fibres from stiff hackle.

Ribbing—Narrow flat gold.

This will be one of those flies that help one out when in doubt. It floats splendidly and the hackles are always good shape and bright if one wants a hackle. I bought a good lot of wood duck last week a thousand miles from here. Several men have sent me wings from only one side of birds, or messed up feathers apparently plucked at random from ducks, wood duck, pheasant, partridge, etc.

Mr. Marston says dun means *dark*. It may mean *dark red* or dark

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

blue or dark gray in cloud effects, or it may refer to paler shades. It all depends upon local habit and custom. Before the age of steam, names and forms were curiously local or provincial.

THEODORE GORDON

Christmas Epistle

Neversink, N. Y., via Liberty, N. Y.

December 22, 1912

DEAR MR. SKUES:

It is sad to have a loyal subject find a similarity between the Imperial ermine and a rat! What! But you must catch your ermine at exactly the correct time, a young one, preferably, before it has much white upon it. A man brought me a big white hare skin yesterday, but only the outer half of hair is pure white and the belly. It is a dry, useless sort of beast now. Just before changing, a youngish one is good (the varying hare).

I got a couple of good red necks and some hackles that would be very good if the cocks had been older. It is most difficult keeping enough duns for use. Never have enough shades or of any one shade. I keep my creams, yellows, or pale mottled hackles and they are sure to come in, sometime. I struck just one man in England who sent decent hackles. Most of them try to work off discards and useless stuff on Americans. It seems most difficult to find any good gingers and buffs, particularly in rather small hackles, and the big buff colored breeds are no use at all. No small hackles and fibres very long. The new fly has been much admired, but I fear that the only bird that will give the wing is the English jay and that does not give many of the pale sets of wings. This fly is the color of one of our duns and will also do well as a typical or general fly. I tried all sorts of hares and rabbits, fox, raccoon, etc., before getting after the ermine, two years ago. The first skin was half white.

Many anglers in this country had fished only the mountain streams of rapid descent. They do not know what it is to fish the slow flowing limestone waters flowing gently through broad valleys, where the water retains nearly the same temperature, and which are full of insect food. Such streams carry an immense head of trout, and there

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

is plenty of fly all through the season. Of course, in summer the rise is often early or late. Most of the insects are small and fishing the smooth clear water is nice work. There are reaches of the mountain rivers that afford opportunities for the finest, most delicate casting, but there is much fast water. On still waters the mountain trout are very easily scared by a slight splash. They are certainly shyer than years ago and I do not wonder at this. The American woodcock never exceeds 10 ounces, a lovely bird, finely mottled on back, breast red-brown, wings dark dun on quill feathers. I enclose a couple. The first, second and third primaries are like sabre blades, or curved narrow sword. I only found them this season and missed one of them. The ruffed grouse wings are in part good color, but owing to the immense strength required for its rapid flight they are stiffened and coarsened just as big wild duck wings are, spoiling them for trout flies. The tails would be good if fibres were made at right angles to rib; they run down too fine at points. Unfortunate, as there are two colors, brown mottled tails and gray mottled tails.

If I was on a salmon river, I would fish a single handed powerful trout rod and dry fly. I know that they have been killed on small floaters down to 0 or 00 and plain looking flies which I tied myself. I doubt if gaudy colors are necessary. One of the best salmon anglers I used to know was very successful with one of his own flies that looked like a big caddis or sedge fly . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, N. Y.

January 16, 1913

DEAR MR. SKUES:

There is nothing in that "Folly" fly. I got one of the originals. It does not really imitate anything, just a guess at one of the bluer winged spring duns. Probably the few fibres of seal's fur were put in to suggest flesh color. Don't know. Very different from the Tup, with its scientific mixture and coloration which produces a lifelike effect upon the water. Have never got it just right to please me, and none of the flies tied after it is enclosed is correct, as far as I have seen. Some are red and white, some red, gray and yellow tip. Many have dark dun hackles on them.



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Our "rabbit" is queer. Henry Wm. Hubert always insisted that it is a hare, yet it has many rabbit ways. He was an Englishman, the first great writer on American sports. I have a skin, also most of one of the varying hares if you care for any.

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, N. Y.  
January 19, 1913

DEAR MR. SKUES:

. . . The American woodcock is smaller and much handsomer than the European, but the snipe is identically the same except for two feathers. It is often called English snipe, instead of Wilson's . . .

If our dry fly men wish for fishing similar to that to be had on the [English] chalk streams near home, they must select the streams with care and *preserve* them . . .

The split wing wood duck plain mottled are tied as one would from right and left quill factors, doubled strips from opposite sides of large (or from two small) feathers. I am doing a little re-stocking with fingerlings; very quietly . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, N. Y.  
February 1, 1913

DEAR MR. SKUES:

. . . A young amateur asked for some of my patterns. One had blue-gray hackles, a lovely natural hackle, so with his brother, who is studying art, they tried dyeing. Mixed blue and yellow (to get green first), then red, and got the color very closely. (Smart?)

. . . I sent in applications for 10,000 fingerlings and 20,000 fry last week, for Neversink and Willowemoc.

THEODORE GORDON

March 6, 1913

DEAR MR. SKUES:

I have not been able to get the artist's idea yet, blue and yellow to green, then red to gray-blue, a real dun tint. The red dominates, even when the green tinge persists . . .

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

There are a good many [fishermen] who skim along the surface, read books, but list nothing. We may get much from good books, and articles in periodicals, but nothing we read is really our own until we have tried it on our own waters . . . What think you of Pope's Nondescript? A friend of mine is strong on a dark-green-bodied fly that resembles nothing in my eyes, but he kills large trout with it. I sent him a whole string of half a dozen greens, including a small Pope's Nondescript. He said that they were perfectly lovely, but I am not fond of green. These had bodies of silk, quill, raffia grass, wool and crewel.

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, N. Y.

via Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

February 16, 1913

DEAR MR. SKUES:

It is very strange that so many men are careless in regard to color of silk used under dubbing . . . I think I would have paid 3/6 for a good dun, and dine on the carcass, if I could not maintain the cock alive.

If I can ever again find a pale young mink skin, I will be pleased. All are too dark. You would like it. I got a very fine muskrat last week, a lovely dubbing with long hairs picked out. The belly is lighter but does not spin nearly as well. Gray squirrel may come in sometime.

I know all of the British game birds from live, dead and mounted specimens. We have some birds in far west that I am anxious to test. The big blue grouse, for instance.

This is becoming the most exasperating country to procure feathers in. Coots are a nuisance in many parts, but feathers difficult to get. One of the few blue enough for some of the early duns. Ronalds' Iron Blue, if dressed of a lighter blue, with a long tail, would answer for what I call the Little Blue, which at times is plentiful in warm weather. I think the adjutant, large feathers, would be very useful to me. A friend of mine has been trying to do something for me at the Bronx Zoo, but no success . . . On some streams the trout seem to fancy the palest possible colors. The Neversink trout will

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

often take a pale yellow body with lightest shades in wings and legs. I fancy that it is better to use flies without wings than improper colors for wings. Men are very fond of winged flies, however, often big and stiff.

A large hackled dun floating fly is sometimes very killing on one of the big streams. The water is so heavy and fish so wild that quite half are lost in playing them. I used beautiful dun hackles that can hardly be replaced, and you see that larger, stronger hooks could be used than if wings had been added. The pattern proved very good in hands of a friend of mine, but he immediately suggested "wings." The Molly Cotton-tail fur was cut from skin of animal, which I shot myself, so color is natural. I had an unusually good skin of head and ears for you but a smart boy swiped it when it was curing. There are no conveniences for dyeing, in the country, and not many of any kind.

I have put in application for 30,000 trout for restocking Willowemoc and Neversink, with good backing, and railroad will handle the cans free of charge.

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, N. Y.

March 28, 1913

DEAR MR. SKUES:

Could you get me (that is, buy for me) the best of the Crawshaw dyes for feathers. Say, green drake, canary, or a good yellow, slate, iron blue, red spinner, etc.? Here the Diamond dyes only include a small range of colors and one has to mess with several. The strong colors work well, but one cannot get delicate shades of color.

I have been reading Mr. Halford's book at night. He is certainly becoming more and more set in his ideas and is so entirely without experience of certain kinds of fly-fishing. I wish that he could see a really fine performance with small wet flies fished upstream with the finest drawn gut, very fine top, when a rise of trout is on. I wish to really know about things, not to be prejudiced by an experience confined to certain localities on waters . . .

The chalk stream fishing is largely artificial since it became so

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

celebrated and expensive. Some men who own water feel about their trout as one would about poultry. They hate to see them killed, at least by anyone except themselves.

What is your opinion in regard to wading and persisting with a rising trout that continues to feed? I usually go on if I do not scare the fish and it continues to rise. If I fail I try to make a better imitation of the fly. I wish you all success in your creation of a preserve. Most interesting work.

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, N. Y.

April 4, 1913

DEAR MR. SKUES:

I can quite understand Mr. Halford's feelings in regard to his carefully preserved and expensive dry fly water and he confesses that he knows nothing of wet fly fishing. Wet fly is not "sunk" fly necessarily. In fact, on the big limestone streams where I learned to fish, a single small fly was often fished and the practice of the best fishermen closely resembled that of the modern dry-fly man, with the single exception that the fly was wet. They were strong on pattern of fly and the color of the fly on the water. Special flies were dressed for those waters by two or three shops in Philadelphia. Surely only a very ignorant person would flog a chalk stream *down*, with wet flies, nowadays. There are not so many experts with wet fly but a first-rate hand does pretty work.

I always enjoy Mr. Halford's books; none more than "Modern Development of the Dry Fly." In those days [1890] one could always find rising trout to practice on.

I will try to find a few small summer duck of a light shade that I have in an envelope. These big ones were intended for strip wings and ends can be used in much the same way. The big feathers are usually nicely mottled. I also have a few big Egyptian goose feathers and browns, several shades, that I fancy would answer for the wings of the brown May fly. I have some raffia grass dyed a sort of *cafe au lait*. Am not sure of having quill. Some time ago a friend sent me some bright green parrot feathers and described a green fly. The

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

feathers were not fit, but I got up a fly to please him. Green wings, pale green body, hackle green olive. Can there be such a fly? He assured me that the trout were taking the naturals. Some of the dry fly fishing on rough water is quite coarse.

Anglers are positive people. One good fellow writes to convert me from a 5 oz. Tournament rod to a  $3\frac{1}{4}$  oz. 8 or  $8\frac{1}{2}$  footer. He evidently thinks that I use a club. The typical English dry fly rod is interesting, well balanced and finished, stout top. I fancy that it will be easy to fish, but a bit slow. The trout here are still in schools, that is, the larger ones . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, N. Y., via Liberty, N. Y.

April 8, 1913

DEAR MR. SKUES:

. . . I cannot find a shade of brown for some brown ephemeridae. It is a brown bordering on *chocolate* and has always bothered me. There are so many snuff browns or yellowish browns that do not suit at all. Years ago I had the color on the Esopus when hatch of the spring browns was on and the fly killed well. One of the remarkable instances was when an immense brown trout rose at my companion's fly twice, in the heat of day, with the sun *behind* the angler and a terrible glare on the water. Such a fish! A perfect whale of a trout. I *saw* it, tho' he did not. I shall read your article on Austin tonight. I think I would have got more out of Mr. West's book if I had bought the more expensive edition with the actual flies in it. I do not care much for the coloring in the illustrations. I have a good Crane fly with raffia grass, pale hackle, slightly barred wings, etc., long hackle. They are not on the water a great deal here.

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, N. Y., via Liberty, N. Y.

April 19, 1913

DEAR MR. SKUES:

. . . In mixing blue and yellow, *to green*, and then adding red to make gray, I struck two or three shades that might prove useful

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

("dead leaf," for instance). Gray with a little purple makes quite a good color.

I hoped not to have to meddle with dyes, but in buying stuff, either the color or quality of hackles, etc. was rotten . . .

Prejudice of any kind is very trying and a bar to progress, in many things. We run against it everywhere, and it is peculiarly exasperating when one has been at work with an open mind, with no other view than the improvement of sport, or its accessories.

Frazier is making beautiful dry-fly lincs now. They seem perfect and he puts a lot of hard work and months of time into each one. He sent me several and I shall willingly show them to good anglers to assist in advertising them, or dispose of them for him. He is so interested in the work. I love to see a man at the job he likes and not uninterested.

I have three *pale* Tups (or near Tups) dressed weeks ago for evening fishing. I always fancied that the real Tup resembled an olive spinner, a nymph, and with dark blue handles, one of the early duns (in this country).

I sent to Pennsylvania for Blue Andalusians, which will be cared for by a farmer friend. We are trying experiments with black and white.

I am deeply interested in the improvement of the large streams of rapid descent, which have suffered from denudation of water sheds. We must imitate the beaver, I think, one of nature's conservators . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, via Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.  
May 1, 1913

DEAR MR. SKUES:

Mr. Halford is like many another. He has become an authority on dry-fly fishing and has been tempted in "Ethics of the Dry Fly" to speak authoritatively on a subject [wet-fly fishing—ED.] of which he knows nothing. How any man can be such an unmitigated ass as to

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

“flog” a slow clear river like Test or Itchen downstream, I cannot imagine.\* It seems such a brainless performance. But to crawl up and present a tiny wet fly to a bulging or rising fish is quite another matter. A good angler would not scare any more fish with the wet than with the dry fly. “Sunk.” Well, I have fished a large fly submerged 6 inches or more for big native trout in the Maine lakes but those fish were in no sense insect feeders. They were (I am speaking of the giants) always stuffed with minnows, but to take one of those magnificent creatures would delight a man for weeks and be remembered with pleasure. On slow streams years ago some very pretty fly fishing was done, in the old style, casting to rising trout and following the colors of nature. Special small flies were tied for such waters. I have seen a man hook or rise nearly every feeding fish he tried. The fly was not dry and floating, but it certainly was not “sunk.” I took to the dry fly in 1890 because it was more interesting and effective. There is much stuff written that is not the result of experience, but of reading. Dry-fly fishing has become more artificial in England. How different Mr. Halford’s last book is in tone as compared with his earlier writings. Stocking with big stew-fed trout before the season opens must produce unsatisfactory sport with foolish fish. I had some experience with 2000 such; one of them was caught every day by somebody belonging to the Club. It had a malformed gill cover. A guest took (and killed) 30 of them in one large pool. Dark colored, ugly fish.

When I use dyed raffia, I wind quite a wide strip, no points show and rib with wire, dyed hair, etc. Makes good Crane flies. I have just killed six trout in a terrible blustering gale of wind. Cast anyhow with a 4¼ oz. Leonard. One big pool would have tried the patience of a saint in such a wind, bank and trees behind, deep water clear across and every trout right against a precipitous bank opposite. I have enjoyed your Austin correspondence. No doubt his family was pleased. I informed Mr. Marston as to the method I use with L.D. for certain pet flies, May flies, etc., but do you not think it might make the demand from professionals for wood duck still greater? The price has

\* Halford, dry-fly purist that he was, ignored the refinements of wet-fly fishing, and caricatured the wet-fly man as a “flogger” of the stream. Gordon, whose acknowledged debt to Halford was great, here sides with Skues, the wet-fly man who was Halford’s chief target.—Ed.

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

gone way up and I fear that a law may be necessary to protect the birds at all seasons . . .

The plain mottled have a marvelous way of giving the wing effect of a number of flies *on the water*. I think a great deal of that. One good hackle wound on correctly is certainly best for quiet water, but in rough streams two hackles seem to work better. Some of the dry fly work is not very fine. It is surprising to see some of the flies that kill on broken water. A friend dyed hackles that looked very nice *dry*, but wet they were very ugly.

By the way, that Jay wings P. R. Hackle and ermine gold ribbed body is a success. I gave La B. a dozen or so at Christmas. Last week in Pa. he used nothing else and had fine sport. He was astonished that it always *cocked*.

I am invited to visit many streams in an automobile, Esopus, Big Indian, Neversink, Willowmac, Beaverkill and then on to Pennsylvania streams, but I hardly feel up to it . . . How I wish Marryat had written a book. Even H. calls him "Master."

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, N. Y.

July 2, 1913

DEAR MR. SKUES:

My strength slowly returns, but since the 10th of May I have been sadly handicapped. Lost three weeks of the best fishing and since the 1st of June have only been able to go out for a couple of hours per day. Even fly making had to be practiced in great moderation.

. . . The leghorns interest me, but was disappointed in two cocks of the Buff variety. I have 7 Blue Andalusians with my friend LeRoy and he has succeeded in breeding one blue cockerel from his own crosses, which we hope will give us perfect medium dun hackles . . .

A big fire in Liberty destroyed about \$250. value of writer's clothing, etc. on storage there, First Editions of Dry Fly Fishing in Theory & Practice, Dry Fly Entomology, Favorite Flies and Their Histories, John J. Hardy's book on Salmon Fishing, Athenian's Cabinet of Devices, Angling Sketches, and several others, Files of Fishing Gazette, etc. etc. My furs I cannot possibly replace. They are so expensive.



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

This will not interest you, but I have been so much alone that I have written many letters. I have such delightful correspondents. Day before yesterday killed a big trout after fishing for it six times, after tea. Got a very fine fish that had been below the bridge for many weeks. As soon as I get stronger, will go to Claryville and Big Indian and then to the Ondawa in Vermont . . . At last, after 4 years have the big brown curlew wings for 2 of our caddis flies (and probably others). Congratulate me.

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, N. Y., Sullivan Co.

August 11, 1913

DEAR MR. SKUES:

The "Sickle-bill" curlew is a fine bird, but unfortunately becoming rare. The plumage is beautifully mottled . . .

I have often heard of Mr. Graham Clark's hackles. In crossing a great number of blacks and whites, we got but one really good dun cock. It is a work of time and requires much patience . . .

I lost the fish of the season through an old brittle gut cast. The minnow fishers have worked hard for that fish since then, but to no purpose. It has a splendid hiding place.

Occasionally one may hit upon good cane or bamboo in a cheap rod. If the rod suits you, have the ferrules refitted, or new ones of the best and the rod will last well. The weak point is the careless fitting.

I worked over all the best rods advocated by experts, from 3½ to 10 ounces, including a typical chalk stream rod. I wished to stated plainly the advantages and disadvantages of each type, for the benefit of young or inexperienced anglers.

It is good fun fishing with the 4 oz. rod, but it is a poor thing when a gale of wind is blowing. The Tournament is probably more powerful than is necessary, but one can do anything with it. The English rod is easy to fish with, in spite of its heavy look and stout top.\*

. . . I like to dine out at country houses where I have standing invitations. Have had much correspondence. La Branche seems to be

\* [Gordon preferred rods much heavier than those in general use today.—ED.]

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

a good sportsman. Sticks to dry fly and kills only large trout. Gill wrote me in very complimentary terms. I love to hear from local anglers in many states. They send insects, etc.

THEODORE GORDON

October 7, 1913

DEAR MR. SKUES:

. . . The dry-fly man should have streams fed by great springs, which remain cool all summer. If temperature rises too high there is no hatch of fly. . . . I tried a dog on Saturday but he had been worked on quail (Virginia partridge) and was not steady on ruffed grouse and woodcock. He made a botch of it, in thick cover, so I only bagged 3 woodcock, 1 grouse and rabbits. I am not strong enough yet for good hard work in the field.

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink  
via Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.  
November 4, 1913

DEAR MR. SKUES:

. . . A farmer friend is keeping one cock I have great hopes of. This is all we have from many crosses and purchases of eggs for setting. I wish that I could afford to throw or give away a large portion of my stock of feathers and hackles, but I am afraid to do so. I try to help a few first rate fly dressers, but to them, of course, I only give good stuff which they need for fine flies.

The cock mentioned is, I fear, changing a bit, from clear pale dun to a sort of honey dun . . .

. . . You would enjoy fishing with the 4 oz. Leonard with wet fly, or in fact, with dry fly when there was very little wind to back against. The coming winter I will try to dispose of the new rods (they are perfectly new) and try having another rod made to order. I wish to satisfy myself what is best for the man of one rod. All my fishing is done with a very stiff Tournament rod, a Leonard of 5¼ oz. 9 feet. It has great power but requires a heavy line . . .

THEODORE GORDON

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

Jan. 11, 1914

DEAR MR. SKUES:

The typical chalk stream rod was built by one of the best of south of England manufacturers and tested by half a dozen dry fly men. His father before him was one of the first and best of the dry fly fishers, who began about 1860. The beauty of the 4 oz. is in delicate delivery of small fly. Of course one is at a disadvantage with a strong downstream wind—but it will kill anything. Affords much sport.

I am trying to get at advantages and disadvantages of all types. In every case there is reason for a preference by one man or another of experience. Now I really prefer a 10 footer of 6¼ to 6½ oz. with a big handle, but it is all in the cane and distribution (Leonard) . . .

Very cold weather, not much snow, but very fine ice. I have had a small room fitted for writing, fussing and tying flies, so may stick a while longer in the country . . .

THEODORE GORDON

(Bradley) Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

March 15, 1914

DEAR MR. SKUES:

Did I tell you that all your writings were buried in that fire in Liberty in 1913? I had everything you wrote for "Fishing Gazette" in a Mark Twain scrapbook. So much interesting matter and valuable books destroyed. It was hard luck . . .

THEODORE GORDON

(Bradley) Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

Apr. 5, 1914

DEAR MR. SKUES:

For one thing, there are only a few men who really know hackles and then the style! You know how we recognize handiwork in flies, yet cannot tell how we do it . . .

I regret Mr. Halford's death and shall take good care of a quantity

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

of his flies he tied for me in 1891 and of the letter that came with them, Duns, Mayflies and Spinners, Sedge, Diptera, Ants and fancy flies. The tone of parts of his last book was unfortunate, but he had become a great authority and dogmatic in his ideas. How changed from the tone of his earlier books, and how changed is dry-fly fishing in England. It rested firmly upon its own bottom, not upon arbitrary rules. Nowadays everything is carried to extremes, like the friend who tries to make everybody fish for trout with 2 to 3 oz. rods, very short, also. The last I heard of him in 1913, he was waist deep in the Esopus fighting the wind on a breezy day. On that same stream a 3 pound fish (and there are far bigger ones) has taken me down thru heavy rapids 200 to 300 yards. If he had not stopped twice for a moment, he would have broken me, yet I had a very fine 10 foot Leonard . . .

Yesterday I received a big package of writing paper and envelopes from a man who says I do not write enough articles for the Press. A gentle hint, but this is appreciation. I had no notion [what] I was writing for when asked to do a little article for Sir Herbert Maxwell.\* I would have taken greater pains and re-written it, but the book is too expensive except for wealthy folk and collectors.

THEODORE GORDON

Apr. 24, 1914

DEAR MR. SKUES:

I was much interested in your reference to Francis Francis. On Saturday I received a presentation copy of La Branche's "Dry Fly on Fast Water." He is a very expert fisher, but manual dexterity ["presentation"—Ed.] is his chief pleasure. Does not believe in color or imitation . . . He thinks that you can create the motion of a rise of fly by constant casting in the same spot. There is so much variety and change in our fishing. Anyone can take certain facts and make a strong showing for his point of view . . .

THEODORE GORDON

\* "Fishing At Home & Abroad," edited by the Rt. Hon. Sir Herbert Maxwell, London, 1913. Gordon's contribution: a chapter entitled *American Trout Fishing*. The piece is largely a rewrite of material which appears elsewhere. Hence I did not include it in this volume.—Ed.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

June 12, 1914

DEAR MR. SKUES:

. . . "Deliberate drag" on quiet water must be used with judgment. I fancied it an original discovery, made almost accidentally when fishing for a big trout that I had spotted. I gave the tip to a fine native angler and he killed the largest native trout of the season, *on a lake*, when the water was like glass. The movement, of course, must be very delicate . . .

. . . La Branche and Hewitt dined with me and spent some hours on Sunday. They had been fishing Roof preserve, where they had taken 100 trout per day, killing only a few brace of pounds. I have read La Branche's "Dry Fly On Fast Water" with interest. I do not agree with him in some of his ideas and theories, but that does not matter. He writes well and has entirely recast the book since he first wrote it, before the publication of Dr. Gill's book.

THEODORE GORDON

Feb. 7, 1915

DEAR MR. SKUES:

. . . There is a very good angler in Liberty [Roy Steenrod—Ed.] who took up the dry fly last season, and has been learning to tie flies this winter. He was very anxious to read La Branche's Dry Fly on Fast Water. I had two copies and sent him one and he was so much pleased . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

Feb. 9, 1915

DEAR MR. SKUES:

. . . I see that I am not likely to be as strong as I was before that horrible attack of "Grip". I have nothing except fly rods and tackle as I quit bait casting from the reel many years ago . . . I read bits of "Minor Tactics of the Chalk Streams" with bits from Mr. Halford's pleas for his new patterns of floating flies in "Modern

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

Development". This was on Sunday. I have found Mr. Halford's accounts of his fishing with the new flies very illuminating as to his methods . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

Apr. 6, 1915

DEAR MR. SKUES:

I find your description of your method of dressing duns, in "Dry Fly Entomology" and the practice of another angler, whose method strikes as very inconvenient, particularly with small duns in o—oo—ooo hooks. Is this all you wrote for the Second Edition? I had had the First Edition stored for years and had pretty well forgotten the contents of the book. The entomology of mountain streams and rivers is so different from chalk streams and limestone streams flowing in broad valleys that I was quite indifferent in regard to all the space devoted to the ephemera. We have a good many hatches of these insects, but there are ten caddis flies and perlidæ for each one. In fact, there are enormous quantities at times in May and June. The trout are certainly not very particular as to the form of the artificial provided you give them the color and size . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.

April 9, 1915

DEAR MR. SKUES:

You would become vastly interested in salmon fly making, if you began with a really satisfactory lot of feathers. There are so many difficulties to be conquered and the results when you succeed are so beautiful, all the best are studies in harmony [from which] one gains much pleasure and satisfaction. I took Forest & Sons of Kelso, on Tweed, as my models. I had 72 of their most perfect flies tied on #2 Salmon hooks (small flies for America, we use 6s, even 10s) and I would not rest until I could tie an equally good fly. It was hard work, I have been three hours on one Jock Scott, but I had an immense amount of pleasure out of it. Salmon were killed on my flies

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

on the Dee and other rivers abroad and in many streams in this country . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, via Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.  
April 29, 1915.

DEAR MR. SKUES:

I have spent 6 out of 7 days in bed during the past week. Caught cold and had rheumatism in the knee. The foot and ankle swelled so that at last I could not get on a tight leather slipper and sock. I can remedy that, if I can be well and I hope to tie flies, if I wish, tomorrow.

Queer nights and short days. I had quite a little fever and you know what a peculiar effect that has upon a man . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.  
Apr. 30, 1915

DEAR MR. SKUES:

Every season I intend, or promise, to give myself the pleasure of tying up a dozen May flies and trusting to you to give to any dry fly man to try. It is an interesting insect and I should be glad to kill a few English trout with it. I have studied many patterns and lots of illustrations and have a fancy for the yellow leg or soft buttery body. Then I saw a lot of the yellow Esopus fly that I often tied and have often used successfully on the Esopus in Ulster County. If not a true mayfly it certainly makes a very creditable effort to be. It is a lovely large fly . . .

About 1st of November I sent for 3 May fly boxes to be given as Christmas present. They did not arrive until *March 29, 1915*. They are a nice article for the dry-fly man, and I would like to have a dozen to give to angling friends.\*

THEODORE GORDON

Am writing in bed.

\* This is presumably the last letter Gordon wrote. He died the following day, May 1, 1915.

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

(b) *To Guy Jenkins, (New York City)*

*Guy Jenkins was a young man when these letters were written. Jenkins was both a friend and a client of Gordon's. At this time, toward the end of his life, Gordon had become a professional flytier.*



Neversink, Via Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.  
Christmas Day [1910?]

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

. . . Here's to a cheerful outlook and an optimistic frame of mind and may good luck be the handmaiden of your skill.

Something in that, you know, as a chump yanked out 5 trout up to 20 inches last summer, with worms!

Snow on the ground and rabbits for dinner. I shot the rabbits.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.  
March 5, 1912

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

. . . The old G.B.S. or Gordon is a good fly as it has been used a great deal for years. The quill [Quill Gordon—ED.] is a very troublesome fly on a/c of its hackle, but as a dry fly it is typical of certain ephemera and I have had some remarkable experiences with it . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, N. Y.  
April 3, 1912

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

. . . The Professor with spun dubbing body is an improvement on one of Pritchard's old patterns and always seems to work better than the silk ribbed body.

THEODORE GORDON



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Liberty, N. Y.

May 2, 1912

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

I hope you have weather like this, today. It is bright and seasonable. The Coachman sent is the fly I mean when there is a flight of flying ants, not "white" ants. They begin to get wings in summer and rise from sandy places in multitudes. They go to the water for something, possibly to take a drink, and are sometimes heavily on. The trout seem to be fond of them.

I found #12 small enough, usually, but sometimes use 14. You will see the ants in the air and crawling about on posts, bridges, etc.

I did not waterproof any of your flies. Asked you if you cared for it, explaining that it spoiled their looks to some extent. I imported a couple of bottles from one of the big wholesale English houses and had considerable trouble before I got it. If you put too much oil on the fly, it will *sink*, but the surplus oil soon washes off and fly floats O.K. There is a stuff dentists use that is a good absorbent to dry flies.

. . . There are a lot of fly floats on market. The best way is to just brush the hackle and wings, tho' I sometimes poke the fly in a bottle of kerosene, then wash off the surplus. I am afraid my dry-fly fishing is too practical, not fancy enough for the cult.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, N. Y.

May 11, 1912

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

. . . With my new short and powerful rod, presented by some of my best friends, I will have to use a fairly heavy line, and may be obliged to float it, although I dislike to do this. With the old rods I could manage with quite a light line. The old, old Leonard would cast any line but I was tender with it. A heavy line is hard on a rod.

You will find mottled wings of many of my flies split; I began this many years ago. The duns sail down with wings upright and close together, so they appear as one.

Many of the caddis buzz and flutter. Sometimes a very thin wing kills best, particularly when water is low and very clear. Early in the

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

season a big show of feather may attract the attention of the hungry fish, but when you are casting to rising trout, feeding on small insects and which has been a good deal fished for, one wants enough hackles to float the fly and no more. The heavy wing is then, I think, a disadvantage. It is the hackles that float the fly and the tail is a great help in floating and balancing it.

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, N. Y.

May 11, 1912

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

. . . There has been much controversy over the best length of leader to employ. One expert used to use only  $4\frac{1}{2}$  feet and another 12 feet. I like a good six foot leader and carry a few fine drawn strands; with these I point the leader, so that I have my fine gut next the fly.

When I make the leaders myself, I find that they average about 7 feet, fairly stout next the line and tapering gradually to two lengths of fine drawn. If I can get the very finest natural gut I use that, as it is stronger and lasts longer than the drawn. It is not easy to get it round and of the same diameter from end to end. Most of the so called natural fine gut has been "regulated," that is, partly drawn to make it even.

If you have a chance try a jet black leader, I want to get one or two, as this question is interesting. There are so many pros and cons. One thing I do know and that is black silk is very hard to see. Your letters always interest . . .

THEODORE GORDON

May 14, 1912

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

Nonsense, you know a great deal about where the trout are and in fact all that is necessary. The charm of fly fishing is that we are always learning something.

I enclose a few hooks, trying to select those that would represent a number of ideas. During a good many years I found a number of

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

kinds, etc. that were peculiarly good, but to get a hook copied exactly means expense and often disappointments.

Last year I had all of the finest hooks made and hoped that there would be some sort of consensus of opinion among anglers so that I could get down to about two kinds and accumulate attention in getting the ultimate best for our fly-fishing, but it is so much a matter of fancy and fashion. Balance is very important in dry-fly hooks, points, barbs, due strength without great weight, etc.

THEODORE GORDON

P.S. If a man wants to know he has to study and prove. Fancy is pretty but we want facts.

Liberty, N. Y.

May 14, 1912

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

I finished tying your Coachman just before dinner, including the dozen small chaps with dun wings. I fancy that you will find this a useful hot weather pattern, and when the water is low and clear. Its field of action is not confined to the winged ant season. I have taken trout with it on blazing hot afternoons. On one occasion it was very killing on the Willowemoc from 4 to 6 o'clock P.M.

. . . We can never learn all there is in fly fishing, but can keep an open mind, and not be too sure of anything. We can learn something from most anglers of real experience. It is a fascinating business . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Liberty, N. Y.

June 24, 1912

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

The grannon (dark) yellow duns and yellow caddis have been among the flies on the water and I have been getting patterns tested. The water has been low and I have tied a good many small flies.

Am getting ready to move somewhere in the country, where I can have a quiet place to write and make flies. Have some hard work with

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

the pen on hand . . . I must, if possible, be quite near a stream, so that I can have a little recreation in the late afternoon and early morning. May go on Neversink, but chubs were very bad there this year. That is on the only day I was on the water.

THEODORE GORDON

Sunday, July 7, 1912  
(Address Liberty at present)

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

I got away from Liberty on the 29th ult. with a heavy load of duffle, yet had to leave many things behind. A nice 5 ton auto truck with a room and bunk on board, could meet my needs, I fancy. . . . It is quite primitive [here] in some ways here, but I found a room that was suitable for work not too easy in the country. I fish a little early in the morning or right after tea.

THEODORE GORDON

Claryville, via Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.  
July 25, 1912

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

. . . There is not much inducement to tie special flies, at present. Fishing is poor, very poor, and the natives seem to have quit fishing much at night. I soured on that some time ago but in extremely hot weather it is about the only way nowadays. The fish are in close hiding during the day and the larger trout feed little . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Claryville, via Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.  
August 20, 1912

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

. . . I wish that I had the money to fix up the streams and stop the ruin of the pools. It could be done, and the larger fish protected through the drouths.

I used the hackle point spinners a good deal on Beaverkill years ago, but this spring noticed that Mr. Marston was using them a great deal as he wrote me that he preferred this wing, not only for Sport

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Spinners, but for up wing (ephemeridae) and caddis flies. I have worked out a good many, the chief difficulty being the legs. Too much hackle spoils the fly, yet you must have enough to float it well. They will stand a rather long one, fortunately. The largest fish recognize them, if color is right. Only yesterday I got up an old black-spotted trout that had been under cover all summer. Have been after him many times. The only chance with these chaps is to hold them hard and this has to be done at once, the instant they are hooked, as they dive a long way under their stone or other hole. Most exasperating if you are using small flies and drawn gut. I got some fine wired 14 and 12 made after an excellent pattern, for fine fishing on low water. The fly dances on its toes with moderate hackle, a big thing on still water, with trout that have been much fished and are shy. I have tried the hooks a little on open water; with high back cast they work well, but break if one touches anything behind. Killed 11 and 8 trout with one, but they were smallish fish . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Hard afternoon yesterday and only one good fish. Returned 8 little things.

On Neversink, Sept. 12, 1912

Address Liberty, Sullivan County, N. Y.

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

I have spent a great deal of money in trying to solve the hook problem in a practical way and have some thousands I shall never use. However, I have arrived at pretty definite conclusions. Several bends will do good work, if correctly made to the original design. The hook makers change a form of hook that has been carefully worked out by the very best men. For small dry flies, the Hall is hard to beat, but it must be real Hall. The Modele Perfect succeeds because of its sharp point, good barb, etc. The bend is excessive, and flies never "look pretty" on it. It is forged and sometimes made too heavy. If a hook is well made, of good stuff, and just enough of the hard brittleness taken out in tempering, it does not require very heavy wires to be strong. Most hooks are broken on the back cast. Few men have a clean high back cast. Pennell Snecks are good in medium sizes, when

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

made as designed by Pennell. So many imitations of both his Snecks and Limcricks in eyed hooks, most of these bad. . . .

Big flies will raise a big fish sometimes, but often scare him, are taken badly at times and fail to hook. After the flood the trout were well fed and I had to reduce size. Men complained of hooks, when the troubles was flies too big and too conspicuous.

If trout are hungry, without education and feeding freely, anything edible, or apparently so, will bring them up. Most decent flies up to quite large sizes will bring them. The conspicuous fly is, of course, most readily seen. With shy fish in slow smooth water, the case is altered, particularly if they have never taken small insects. We often scare good fish without knowing it. A few small flies have been up and the big stone fly. If these last were plentiful they would start all the big fish to feeding.

THEODORE GORDON

P.S. I had an old 14 copied in 14 and 12. Only got them late in the season. I have to test every one in a vise but they do well on fish, in low water particularly. If I could be at the manufacturing, see the men a little, this form could be made heavy and light, and an almost perfect form got for our work. . . .

Liberty, Sullivan Co., N. Y.  
September 28, 1912

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

. . . I wrote a good many simple "Little Talks" which were in *Forest and Stream*. Some were copied in England. I wish I had the best in cuttings to send to you, but they were, I fancy, not like the letters written to you.

I would like to have hooks to please everyone and have sent out all the very best bends, but there is no sort of agreement among fishermen, mostly they seem to go by days when trout were taking *well*, whereas it is best to judge when they are taking *badly*. There are certain sound principles which should govern one's selection. Sharp points, good barbs (not too large or rank), depth behind barb, fair bends, well proportioned shanks and good eyes, set at correct angle, etc. For small flies a slight twist is an advantage and enough

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

of the hardness must be taken out in tempering in oil, yet they must not be too soft.

I have quantities of hooks, yet must order a lot more to try to have on hand what many are particularly desired. There is usually a run on one bend for a time. This is very dull, I know. The weather is rotten. I should move lower down where I know people, but wanted to fuss with insects.

THEODORE GORDON

P.S. I write lots of stuff I tear up. Labored over one article on preserving the streams and improving the trout fishing, but got it too dry, I think. Destroyed about half of it.

1912

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

I do not care so much to study a natural under the microscope and held close to the eye, but I do want the effect on the water when I can get it. Some years ago there was a rise in the stream and I found a good many trout in a long streamy sort of pool about 300 yards in all. They seemed to rise pretty steadily from 5 to 7 P.M. I did pretty well with favorite flies for several days, then I would fail to get a rise out of more than one trout in five. I found that there was a little bright caddis on the water and they were taking it. I tied a few flies and got the effect. I tried first with a small dun over a number of trout, then changed to the imitation and secured some very nice fish.

The one I had first tried was rising at the lower end so after reaching the top I tramped back and put the new fly over him. He rose and was hooked and gave a splendid bit of sport as the water was cold and proved to be 16½ inches not to be sneezed at.

These things add much to the interest of fly making and fishing, but you would not realize the time and pains it requires to get what you want in the raw materials to produce just the effect you desire.

THEODORE GORDON

Pardon this yarn.

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, N. Y.

January 30, 1913

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

. . . At times trout seem indifferent in regard to gut, but again fishing quiet water with small flies, fine drawn points are an advantage. The fly alights softly and gut does not show up much. In some lights, when the fish are feeding on small insects it is pretty difficult to deceive them. Much of the fishing is done in water that assists deception. . . . Last season was a great caddis year with flies running from pale to very darkest shades, mostly dun. Browns were not plentiful as formerly where I was. Some very queer flies about. That big drop in June I at first took for a land fly, but it lays its eggs on the water. Later, after a year or perhaps several, I think it crawls out and pupates in the ground. I rarely fish with any patterns but my own.

THEODORE GORDON

I take great pains to have flies cock and never have them on snells. A little trouble to knot on but they are in good shape and a good knot is strong at the eye.

Neversink, via Liberty

Sullivan Co., N. Y.

February, 1913

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

I worked out a number of patterns. The great difficulty is to get the shade and effect on the water and then secure feathers of exactly the same shades for a large number, if required. It is possible that on streams where the dry fly is much fished the trout may become more wary. To fish quiet smooth water is the real test, particularly when it is low and the fish are easily scared. The slightest splash, I find, will scare a good trout then. When there is a large body of water early in the season, the fish are not shy and very often take a very conspicuous fly. They are hungry and like a good mouthful sometimes. It is not always the largest fly that hooks best even when the fish rise at all. For instance, Taylor said that he lost a lot of trout one day fishing with long Mayfly hooks and blamed the hooks (the same make as used by the best men in England). I would have been puzzled



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

if I had not been fishing the same day. The water was high, clear, the fish had fed up and were in fine condition. I was using same hooks, several trout rose and nipped the fly, then I saw a large fish come halfway up and go back. I reduced size of fly and gave more time, not striking so quickly. Killed the large one and several others that had moved before.

It is often necessary to give a little time. If you hook a trout outside, it is probable strike was too quick. When they savage the fly they are of course pretty sure to work well, but I must stop talking and tie flies.

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, February 9, 1912

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

. . . Be sure to tell me what time you will go to the Esopus and what part of it and watch your weather. There are several clay slides and heavy rain soon raises and dissolves lower water where Halsey fished. I used to fish the stream a great deal. If seasons did not vary so greatly, I could fit anyone with a few flies for any week in May or June and can come pretty near doing it. You know that I only fish with my own patterns, either typical flies or imitations.

The best way is to live right on the stream and it is hard to find a place where one can work, have mail facilities, and yet keep an eye on the insects and fish a little at the time of the real rise. I am quite satisfied with two hours if it is the right time and not far to tramp.

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, N. Y., March 2, 1913

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

. . . A few days ago on a stream where good or big trout lie, in shallow quiet water, or in slow flowing pools, in rather small streams, where one can often see them before fishing for them, teaches a man a lot. Very soon he will be using tackle and flies as fine as he dares to risk (not the smallest).

Fish in large bodies of water are more confident yet we scare many without knowing it.

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

I am fond of a well balanced hook. The Model P has splendid points and barbs, fine quality, but is a bit exaggerated. The Hall when made as designed by a number of the best dry fly men in England is best, I think, for small flies. With large hooks, say 10 or bigger, a fly may look better on a straight hook (without twist) or on a long shank. The long extra strong Mays are very reliable for big fish and night work. Night fishing and also rough waters tend to make our fishing rather coarse and every now and then one is mortified to find that he has been scaring big fish by his careless casting with heavy flies. One of the many advantages of eyed hooks is that you can use any gut required for the conditions to be met and with a good knot very fine gut may be used. The leader is soft, of course. The convenience of stowage is great and by carrying the flies in a box they may be kept perfect. It is wise never to crush the hackles of a dry fly or stick the hooks into anything. A fly may be crowded with hackles until it is like a tooth brush. It will kill at times but not well on fine water. In the long run, one will gain by fishing quite fine though at times unnecessary. Where there were only a few big browns and natives, I used one fly only with strong tackle throughout as I wanted the former, but I had some lessons. One must use his common sense. . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, March 14, 1913

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

I like to use imitations or typical flies that fairly represent a class of insects. To have confidence in one's flies is half the battle.

If a fly looks right to you on the water, it is apt to look right to the trout. It is the effect one wishes, not so much its appearance close to the human eye. Fish have not as true an appreciation of form as man. A shadow may frighten them (even the sucker). . . .

THEODORE GORDON

I fancy that pale evening dun will not be good until warm weather. . . .

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Neversink, April 10, 1913

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

Pretty well tired tonight but will try to answer the most important part of your letter. Tying in gut makes the fly heavier and more bulky, more silk, more wax, and the gut, etc. Wikhams have heavy gold to carry and (the best) a thin padding of floss, which makes gold brighter. Then I run a gold wire over the ribbing hackle. Most dry fly men use the Turle knot, but I prefer the outside figure of 8 learned from Capt. Frank Wey Wemyss of Wales . . .

You cannot keep dry flies in first class shape to cock and float with Snells. All convenience of stowage is done away with. You cannot use gut to suit the water, fine or stout. The gut is apt to be dry and brittle. . . .

The eyed hook was a great boon to dry fly men. One can carry a stack of flies conveniently and several shapes worked out by Mr. Hall and others are excellent. The only difficulty is to make the manufacturers stick to these forms. All fine hooks are hand-made and little changes creep in. . . .

THEODORE GORDON

[Probably] April, 1913

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

. . . The bait fishers had a fine time while the water was discolored by rains. I do not like to see good trout dragged out with a meat hook. Some of them take great quantities of those little trout you saw last season, fishing the shallow ripples with bits of small minnow.

I have done very little work, because I could not. I like to keep up with the men on the streams and keep them going on special flies. As might be expected, the rise of fly has been very queer. During those fine days before the 8th instant, no big rise of anything, except a Caddis that left the water instantly, transformed in a fraction of a second. A pale delicate perlidac was the most plentiful on the water. Lots of odds and ends, very pretty but not plenty enough to count. Some very good hatches during the past 8 days. A quill body brown shade should kill. One of those flies is troublesome, so pale on belly

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

and dark above, but the main thing is to get the effect on the water. Lures, fished wet, were as good as anything at first. Trout green and greedy.

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, N. Y., May 13, 1913

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

. . . The first 8 days were great everywhere, as weather was good and season very early. . . . I stuck to the dry fly but the man who wanted a lot of trout filled up his basket with wet flies. Trout were already in the ripples, were in fine condition and full of ginger. I had fish of 1 to 1¼ lb. run off a lot of line and leap again and again. Of course I do not kill many fish when living near the stream. The trout were not very discriminative. A good many flies were out, but not a strong rise of one species. Perlidae and caddis were most numerous. Lots of the flies I saw used were taken as baits or lures.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley via Liberty  
Sullivan Co., N. Y.  
February 22, 1914

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

. . . On many streams the fish take large flies well. If a large trout is in position, but not rising at small insects, he is likely to go for a good big fly, when, perhaps, he would disdain a midge or small fly. . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley via Liberty  
Sullivan Co., N. Y.  
April 3, 1914

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

. . . There is a hackle fly in England with a body of a "secret" dubbing that has been a great killer. [Probably Tup's Indispensable.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

See Skues correspondence.—Ed.] Through an inside source I got a small sample of this dubbing and by blending pig's wool, seal's fur, etc., I got close to it. . . .

A somewhat large fly kills usually [at this time], and a rather conspicuous one, and it looked to me last season as if wet fly killed *much faster* than the dry, first few days. I made many more casts it seemed to me, than the man I was watching and he took six trout in one spot of very fast, broken water. (Royal Coach., wet.) Of course the trout are very hungry and unsuspicious early in the season. Yellow bodies were good as two yellow bodied naturals were plentiful, but you know my weakness for Quill G. and duns. You must have confidence in the fly you use and then there is so much in the delivery or way you fish it, but I should be in bed.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, March 30, 1915

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

I am glad that you like the flies. There are several things I wish to do for you for which I did not have time. I must manage to send you a couple of small Bumblepuppies for big trout on the larger class of streams. At times they are very deadly, particularly on the Esopus and lower Beaverkill.

I will tie the #12 Pale Evening Duns for you shortly. Have made a memo of the three varieties of Whirling Duns for you and the other matters. I wish you could meet my Red Game Cock. He is the noblest bird I ever had, but it was comical to see him standing on my knee enjoying himself while I pulled out his feather. He likes to be with men.

You will find that the rather large (#8) Pig's wool bush fly is a killer fished wet.

A gold bodied spinner and duns are both very killing flies and a very pale yellow body. I have such difficulty in buying strong gold wire. I had a supply which has given out and it seems impossible to find it in England. I am now trying Ireland.

THEODORE GORDON

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

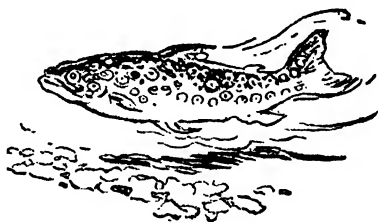
March 26, 1915

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

I forgot to put the merest threatening of shellac on heads of flies. It is not important with my flies as I use the whip finish, but still I like to have it protect the tying silk.

Some of your flies have a red game cock hackle that is a dandy. I bought the cock last Spring and of all the fighting games I ever struck he takes the lead. The boys brought him to me several weeks ago so that I could take some of his hackles. He stood on my arm, knee or shoulder and crowed. Liked to be handled and sat cheerfully on my leg while I pulled hackles, crowing occasionally. He did not care how many of his feathers I pulled out. He is a noble bird. I got several good birds this year, that is, their hackles. It is most difficult to get hackles that will satisfy me at all. My collection of artificial baits is now very interesting, but between that and my expensive rod, my bank account is knocked into a cocked hat. But I have had value received and get constant pleasure and diversion with them. The longer I have the little rod the better I like it. It is the stiffer of the two sent up and weighs  $3\frac{5}{8}$  oz., wonderful quickness and power for its weight. What pleasure one has in a rod if it is a success. I am better this week and am now working on flies for friend No. 2. Of course there will be no fly fishing in April, but men expect flies because the season opens early and it crowds me to try to get enough for a few friends.

THEODORE GORDON



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

(c) To Roy Steenrod (Liberty, New York)

*These letters to his good friend and neighbor, Roy Steenrod, like the letters to Guy Jenkins, were written during the closing years of Gordon's life. They are often personal and concern many things revealing of himself as he went to the grave intent upon the fantasy of the stream.*

[Neversink, N. Y.  
1913?]

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Herls from the green feathers are very short, and not easy to work into a nice body but a hackle fly made with this body is very killing at times. A gray or pale dun hackle I like but some prefer the red. This fly is particularly killing for native trout and in the smaller streams, like the Big Indian. That used to be the most prolific trout stream in the country. It was wonderful.

We went there to stay the 1st of July. I had been fishing big waters, and the Big Indian looked trifling to me. I thought there were nothing but small trout in it for about a week. Then I discovered that there were good trout and a lot of them.

I remember going upstream about 2 o'clock (promising to return to supper) to a stretch that ran under a hill. I began carelessly but after taking one or two nice fish I woke up. It was but a short reach full of flattish rocks, no deep water, but out of it I took 15 very handsome trout. At the end where the stream turned was a hole by a rock, and a little fall about a foot high into it. I put a little dun close to the rock and took out a 12-inch trout. I did not go much further as I had to be back to tea.

When I returned past the hole by the rock I thought I would give it a try just for luck. I dropped the same small fly close to the rock and saw a faint rise, like a minnow. I struck and instantly a large fish rushed downstream at me and passed under a one-plank foot bridge. I had quite a time getting in the slack and on terms with the trout, but got it out. It proved to be a beautifully colored brown trout, 18 inches long. A few weeks earlier another angler had taken a bigger fish just above, in the first pool. It was a nice summer, no drouth, and

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

whenever we had a cold change I would go down the Esopus and take some very handsome brown and rainbow trout. So much for a stream I thought held only little trout.

THEODORE GORDON

[Neversink, N. Y.  
1913?]

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . La Branche was shooting in Virginia in December. Mostly quail, but two days duck. He sent me ½ doz. wings. He is a most enthusiastic fisherman and theorist. He is as full of experiments as an egg is full of meat. Think he prefers the streams where they are not very large. He uses an 8 foot 3½ oz. rod now I believe.

THEODORE GORDON

I wish the manufacturers made the old style Henshall minnow casting rod 8 feet 3 in. now. It answered for all around fishing with natural and artificial bait but was too long for *overhead* casting.

[Neversink, N. Y.  
1913?]

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I am all right today. I put on an old pair of fishing stockings last night so I was not chilled standing on the ice cold floor. You helped me out greatly by coming over. I felt miserable and good for nothing. My little 8-footer is to be up this week. I am very anxious as I fear that it may not be up to expectations. . . .

We used to get good native trout also in the early spring. Gordon [a cousin] and I went up the Ryngip (?) in April and first fished the Stony Clove branch, way up. He fished bait and I a couple of pools of dark clear water much brushed. By persistent work I got four nice half-pounders out of those pools, on a good sized dun, and by the time he had fished down he had four, but smaller. We then took the road up the main brook that runs past Cranberry Pond. He went away up to fish down and I fished up very slowly. It was so brushed and so small. He soon came down, and reported that while he had



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

caught a few small trout, neither big nor little cared for his bait. The large fish would suck the end of his worm and then drop it. He suggested that I might do something with fly in the biggest pool in the brook (I had taken only one  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. fish) as two large trout (for natives and that brook) had sucked his worm there. So we went there. It is a round pool, with the water flowing over shelving slate. I had bait low down under the trees and brush, and cast very low and flat. Both fish came to look at the large dun, but refused it. Then I rang the changes on many colors. Some moved then, some did not, but I kept them interested. At last I hooked one by the skin of his teeth on a No. 12 dun, and Gordon slipped down to tail of pool and netted him. A very fine trout for a brook, 14 ounces, and all the fish in it are fat as pigs. Ryngip is full of immature insect life and the trout are in fine condition on the 1st of April. Well, we resumed our positions, my cousin lying down where he could see everything, and I pursued the same tactics for the second trout. After many changes it took the same little fly that killed the first, and Gordon slipped down and netted it. It was only hooked by a shred of skin and weighed 12 ounces. I was very pleased with my basket of 7 native trout. They were very large for the brook. Gordon said he was never so much interested in fishing. He had taken the time and I was over an hour catching those trout. He said that he never saw anyone change flies so often, or saw trout rise and refuse so often. I know that to me it was a bit of keen sport.

THEODORE GORDON

Tuesday, [1913?]

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Yes, I should be glad to read the May *Field and Stream*. American Field seems strong on kennel, etc., but I have seen some fine articles reprinted from it. Years ago it had some splendid contributions.

Outdoor World seems to be doing well, but none of the papers in this class is likely to be a *great* American sportsman journal, or hold the place that the *Field* does in England.

THEODORE GORDON

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

[Neversink, N. Y.  
1913?]

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

The Editor sent me a copy of *Field and Stream* for April. Better save your numbers, it may be worth while to put Rhead's articles in scrapbook.\*

The V-shaped wings on dry flies are partly to assist in cocking the fly, helping to drop it feet down and lightly. The ephemera *at rest* holds wings quite close (erect) but of course can spread them. When *spent* the wings are almost at right angles to the body. Perlidae and trichoptera, so common on our streams, are restless, flutter and even run in water (stone flies) with wings up. Mr. Rhead only gives forms that we have had for many years. The great trouble is *color* in illustrations. Since 1889 I have spent several hundred dollars in this line. Of course it is easy to draw natural and artificial flies and color them with the *same paints*, but I have gone over many hundreds of illustrations and rarely found them near the natural colors or of any real service in making flies. In England a man will work for years but here it seems a few weeks on the Beaverkill is all that is required (with English books to refer to). Ronalds original 1st and 2nd Editions 1836-1839 colored by himself are the best in all these years.

THEODORE GORDON

[Neversink, N. Y.  
1913?]

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

It is most disappointing. I hoped that we would have a week or two of decent fishing by day after the rain and cool change that often comes in August. There is, of course, a good chance for big fish at night, but night fishing is a poor business. I used to do a good deal in the dusk but to fish *all night* as some of the men do now is not real sport. However, you can get the fish if you stick at it. I have known the trout to *begin* as late as 1:30 A.M. The larger trout are

\* In another letter—otherwise without interest enough to print—Gordon says of Rhead's flies: "Extension bodies look attractive but are not satisfactory in use."—ED.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

concentrated in the low water as there are only a few deep pools. I regret now that I did not go to Vermont, to a stream full of springs and where I would have lived close to good dry fly water.

THEODORE GORDON

(Do you need any large night flies?)

[Neversink, N. Y.  
1913?]

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

You go into something that you have not thought of for years, and you feel so ignorant it hurts, but in a short time you begin to get onto a good many points. You acquire some theoretical information anyhow. From my recollections of old articles, a few clippings, and then catalogues I picked up something on modern baits for bass, pike, mascallonge, etc. Darling likes a spinner (enameled) with pork rind better than all the plugs in creation. They are heavy, clumsy things, but they surely get the big bass and muskies sometimes.

I do not know what you killed your big bass with last summer. We had such good bass fishing when I was growing up down in Rockland and Orange Counties. Even Rockland Lake held a lot of very fine small mouth black bass. They were in all the small lakes in the Highlands, and we used to camp out at Summit Lake near a hotel boarding house. The little Summit Lake was full of small pickerel and a few bass but a lovely little lake on  $\frac{1}{2}$  or  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile distant, I forget name, held splendid fish. I killed one small mouth on a very large frog; he weighed strong 5 lbs., and we got a number from 4 to  $4\frac{3}{4}$  lbs. but we had to have the damdest variety of bait in September. All sorts, two of the men had been fishing one of the Twin Lakes, they were very small, but they knew there were good bass there. At last one man put on a cricket and caught 9 beautiful bass in a short time. One year they took locust. We always had minnows, frogs, crawfish, hellgrammites, and crickets; you never saw such a lot of old pots and buckets. We had a regular bait farm where we could keep all these baits alive and in good condition.

THEODORE GORDON

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

[Neversink, N. Y.  
1913?]

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

This did well. Only one I have. It is the fly I named after La Branche a year ago. Wings are English.

It stands grief well in spite of the delicate wing. You can see this has been used hard and has lost tail.

THEODORE GORDON

[Neversink, N. Y.  
1913?]

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Do be careful in buying one of those expensive fly boxes having a lot of little compartments. To me they are a damn nuisance, finicky and troublesome. A good many things are sold in very nice tin boxes, which you can arrange to suit yourself and there is a cheap leader box 35 cents with flange around inside the rim. One could carry two or three easily. Some shallow boxes have sharp edges that cut off tails, etc. The only trouble with my makeshifts is you have to look out on windy days. I did think of sending over for some boxes for May flies with only 6 compartments made by a man named Wadham. Might prove more practical.

THEODORE GORDON

[Neversink, N. Y.  
1913?]

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Bruce and I once caught two small pickerel at Stevensville on big Bumblepuppies one afternoon. I have taken 2 bass, bream, rock fish, perch, sun fish, pickrel, etc., on BP's, not to mention big trout in the Esopus. Good when they are feeding on minnows.

I received a little lead wing Coachman on #12 hook from a Post Master way up in Wisconsin yesterday. I had sent him a few flies as a present in return for a bouquet he threw at me about a little article. He said he fished the meadow streams for native trout of 8 to 15 inches as it was pleasanter, and he had extraordinary sport with these

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

small dun-winged Coachmen. They always have been excellent in hot weather, if water was cool enough for trout to feed.

In the long pool above Big Bend I once found a lot of trout concentrated under the far banks and rising at winged ants. I put up the dun wing, and killed 22 lovely fish, right there, under the long curbing bank.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

[1913?]

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

It is such a luxury to have plenty of rubber bands. I sent you all the crewels (parts of) I have, but they do not compare with the lot bought at Macy's many years ago. Those colors were so lovely and bright. I got on to them through a woman doing fancy work on the porch of a hotel. I was very sorry to hear of Mrs. Marbury's death. This is a perfect day, and I trust that the dry air will help my Mother's breathing.

There are so many things. I will strike them now and then to send to you.

I sent Abbey and Imbrie a little order, 2 smallest agates, Rush's Swimming Minnow, and some sinkers and things. Funny thing—that minnow. My collection will soon be quite interesting yet nearly everything is inexpensive. TakaPart reels and baits from 15 to 50 cents. The Pearl Minnows are the best I ever saw. They are beautiful but I had to pay 75 cents for them. They are well worth it. When you come we will open the tin box and see how Hildebrandt cut his pork.

The duplicate of the mascollonge bait is a corker. Beautiful "Bob" of white dress hair, but very fine for deer it looks, big hook in middle of bob, perfectly concealed.

My curiosity is great. I paid 45 cents for a "Keep 'Em Alive Fish Stringer" and it seems a good thing. Probabilities are I will have to give it away to get it used properly. Sort of safety hooks to pin bass to the chain, leaving them free to breathe and swim. That black E line

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

level is first rate. . . . I always loved black lines but have not had a good one in 18 years.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.  
[1913?]

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I can not read at present, must write or do something to occupy my mind . . . . I was travelling long ago from Brooksville to Tampa [Florida] by the mail hack. It was a long trip in those days. We arrived at the driver's house about 4 P.M. No one near except a few Seminole Indians; I saw a gun behind the door and ammunition, and doves flying in and out of a pea field, in front of the house. I went out and flushed a small covey of quail, dropping one bird. I followed them into a swampy place that had dried out and stepping across a tussock put my foot close to a large diamond back rattlesnake. I jumped back and blew its head off, but I saw snakes all the way to the house.

I found that it was a bad place for them. The little boy had been struck by a small ground rattler that morning. An old Indian woman had come with herbs, made a poultice and a tea, and he was much better by bedtime, but it was only a little snake. Then the driver said we should have fish for breakfast, and brought out two great saplings, trimmed up and dried out. They were equipped with strong lines, big hooks, leads, and the big corks that come in pickle bottles. An old man went with us and we soon arrived at a small lake (a plank boat). A large 'gator was swimming in the middle. We had no bait, but broke stems of lily pads and found small white grubs. Then fished with small hooks and lines. The big man got a perch the size of your hand and stuck the great hook under the back fin. He took the biggest rod and slammed out. Presently the cork went down and a game of pull and haul began. You never saw such an ass. He braced himself in the boat and tried to pull the biggest big mouth I ever saw into the boat. At last, after he had torn a great gash in the fish's mouth, it leaped close to the boat full 5 feet in air. Good Lord, man, you never thought of such a bass. I never did. I believe it weighed 20 to 25 lbs. Think how easily he could have had it, but it shook the big

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

hook out at the top of its spring. We only got one more perch and the big man killed that putting it on hook, so we got no fishing. We went fire hunting for deer that night. The big man had the only gun. We shined the eyes of two deer, but he could not shoot for some reason. Two crackers were camping out, shooting deer for Tampa market. They sent only the choicest parts. They hunted in bare feet with trousers rolled up to knees. I asked them if they were not afraid of the rattlesnakes. They said that *they always saw the snakes first*. I have seen diamond backs 8 feet and two much larger were killed near the Telegraph Cable Station at Puerta Rossa years ago.

THEODORE GORDON

[Neversink, N. Y.

1913?]

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Ten years ago there were many big fish and much good water between Claryville and Halls Mills, but there are very few places now and no one ever tells me of immense fish, as they used to.

After the big flood Saturday night (August) three years ago, I had very nice sport on Monday, and about 3 days later the landlord hitched up his old white horse and drove me down stream nearly 3 miles to get away from posting. I found that he stuck to the shallows where he could pick up 8-inch brown and native trout, but I did not care for such fish. I worked pretty hard for half a dozen trout, 11 to 14 inches, and then started up stream looking for a hole near the road which I thought must hold several large trout. They had built a rip-rap of logs and stones, inside a good hide, and below was a hole about 8 feet deep. I found the place without and fished all the lower parts of the pool carefully. Then I advanced and tried a lovely spot for a taking trout to lie. Put on a new fly and gave it a touch of oil. At the second cast a very fine trout started from the bottom 6 feet away and seized the fly savagely. I got it out. Then crossed and went out on the docking to study the pool. Now I had noticed a very large trout on the bluff as I came up and an excited individual appeared opposite and demanded that I leave at once. It was preserved water. I went cheerfully enough but I did want to try that pool at best time in morn-

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

ing and evening. It is the best place for a large fish in several miles.

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, N. Y.

July 3, 1913

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . The theory of imitation is sound. Then we must remember that we are dealing with one of the game or predatory fishes, which may be excited by movement, life, color. At times fish seem to be curious and rise at any small object. They attack a small trout or companion, that is hooked or in trouble. When there is a heavy rise of one species of insect they often seem to see no other, particularly if this insect continues to rise day after day.

When taking the tiniest of natural flies trout that have been much fished for are often difficult. I spend much time over such fish, but do not always succeed. This miserable heat has spoiled fishing here. One might dredge all night but I do not care for it, though where you know of a great fish that is hidden away all day, it is exciting to go for him at dusk. . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, N. Y.

July 6, 1913

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I will mail you a copy of the *Forest and Stream* in the morning, which please return.

I do not know that you will care for "Bonnie Brook" [F. & S., July 5, 1913. See p. 327.—Ed.] but you may be amused by Dr. Breck's letter. He had said early in 1912 something about May flies and the floating fly being N.G. in Nova Scotia, where he lives; so I made a fair offer to copy flies if sent to me. Then two weeks ago came the same complaint again. So I wrote. I thought that he was prejudiced and probably had not given the dry fly a fair show. Now comes this reply.

THEODORE GORDON



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

[Neversink, N. Y.?]

July 16, 1913

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

The water was never so low. No chance for a basket of fish (trout) anywhere near Neversink. You might get some at night at Halls Mills or in Willowemoc or Beaverkill, same time. Still, the weather is fairly cool and if you wade well upstream where water is cooler, something might be done by day. Nothing but gnats in the water just now. The greenish body fly was on in May and June. Not much use to fish imitations of anything in particular unless there are natural flies about. They do not hatch much when the water is warm and don't like hot sun.

THEODORE GORDON

Neversink, 4th August

[1913?]

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I have mighty little snap in me now. I have almost given up the intention of going to Vermont for the fishing. I know that I could get some big fish late in the evening or at night but I want day fishing in cool water, although I used to be fond of the nights. But it is not the same. The stream does not *smell* the same. The air used to be so sweet and pure that we loved to be out in it. Possibly it is only this louder river but we have hotter weather than formerly. go in the shade here several days.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, Dec. 25, 1913

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I hope that you are enjoying a Merry Christmas on this misty, dark anniversary. I did not open any boxes (fortunately) until this morning and that helped a good deal to make the day real. This afternoon I tramped, as usual, and startled one rabbit, which I bagged. Too many self-hunting dogs about and rabbits are actually getting scarce, except in very favorable locations. It must be getting near the end of their period.

THEODORE GORDON

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Do you know of any photographer in Liberty who could take photos of bare hooks, and also of flies, suitable for reproduction? I have done so much work and spent so much hard earned cash on hooks, that I might put results into an informative little article. There is a lot more in it than you might imagine. The hooks would have to be on thin pasteboard or stiff paper.

THEODORE GORDON

A Red Quill. [Enclosure.]

What the trout takes R. Coachman for, when fished dry, I cannot imagine. I do not use it, except water is colored, but lots of men do, and kill with it. These hooks are Long Mays, and very strong.

Bradley, N. Y.  
May 6, 1914

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . I tied flies yesterday morning, but braced up enough to get out for a short time. Found one decent pool and a few small flies hatching so picked out 4 trout in a few minutes. Did not care to fish the shallows, endless rushing water hereabouts. Am afraid fly making is bad. At first I could not see my fly on the water; was half blind.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.  
May 26, 1914

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

After all is said—how little we get out of these magazines. Now and then a splendidly interesting article! I like the Willowemoc and know that it holds a lot of good fish. The stream here has been alive with fishermen. Some fine fish killed but the average not so good as last season.

Will try to find time to tie some Female Beaverkills for you. It is Cooper's fly. It depends upon the water; whether the wet or the dry pays best. I stick to the dry, because it affords me most pleasure and best sport. The best fisher here has used wet fly a great deal this season, and has killed many trout that way—but he changes to a floater very quickly when the trout are rising. He has the reputation

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

of killing big baskets and boards fishermen; so he has to make a daily showdown.

I bought this tiny typewriter to save time and labor—but am in doubt about it. Have no typewriter paper but will get some. The machine is only 4½ pounds. Price \$18.00. Hold on to hooks; I am hunting for three enormous hand-made sea hooks. Had them in my hand. Would make a splendid contrast [with small wide trout hooks—Ed.]. It is red-hot today. I fear that fishing will play out early.

THEODORE GORDON

For 12 trout mosquitoes *very bad*.

Bradley, N. Y.

June 5, 1914

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Yesterday I hear that the trout fed well. Two men with fly and bait made a large catch. Chubs are very bad in the pools. I actually took nice pickerel bait on dry at the big rock; before tea. Trout pretty scarce near here; but I got half a dozen decent fish.

I have been trying to get together a bunch of selected magazines to send to you. Those with something readable in them.

Sent for a fresh ribbon and the print is a bit better—but the touch required is a damn nuisance; and makes speed out of the question. I found an old typewriter once, at my cousin's, and found great comfort in it. . . .

Bradley, N. Y.

June 8, 1914

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

If you come over on Saturday I trust that air and water will be cool. Chubs drive you crazy when water is warm and trout are not on the hop.

The wind moderated a good deal but the water was still cold on Saturday, so went a-fishing. Did not raise a single large trout, yet they were feeding well. I got 5½ pounds, nothing over 11 inches. Caught

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

many chubs. They mess up fly and waste much time. Are good for chicken feed.

THEODORE GORDON

H. [Halford—Ed.] had 1200 flies!

Of course men who fish miles of the stream, all day long, do best.

Bradley, N. Y.

July 2, 1914

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

It is very strange that I cannot find those remarkable hooks. One was made by forging in British Columbia for the Indians, salmon and haddock fishing and I imported the others myself.

As to plans I am puzzled. Might go to Claryville again, but I find that indigestion is reason why I have been out of shape. If you cannot eat simple food, what can a man do?

I don't care for night fishing and water down this far gets too warm for day fishing.

I have not made a fly or caught a trout since I caught cold over a week ago.

Probably a man could have a better time on some good lake in July, Aug. and Sept. Do you know of a good lake in Sullivan Co. not crowded with boats and people?

THEODORE GORDON

P.S. You have not got my idea in "Standard Oil," nothing is so light.

The first dip fills fly with the clear oil. Wrapping or throwing on the water removes surplus oil. One back cast (sharp) removes water. For some time but one back cast is required to free fly from moisture. No discoloration, no injury to fly. The paraffin oil is too heavy. Some of the preparations are nice but expensive and none of them work better than my old lamp oil, which I used when there was nothing else to be had.

THEODORE GORDON

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Bradley, N. Y.  
Oct. 17, 1914

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

The most expensive illustrations have often been most unsatisfactory to the fly fisher. Ronalds' fly book (his own work) is about the best to this day (1st and 2d Editions only). Try to send *Sunday Sun* as well as *Times*. Helps me out, as Sunday papers have good articles.

I want to see what cold weather will do and then decide about a trip. I really want to go to the coast, and to get off the line of tourists and sportsmen.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.  
Nov. 27, 1914

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

You have no idea of the difficulty in finding materials for first rate flies. At a pinch we can use anything, and kill fish with rough flies too, but for flies that will satisfy you, that is another matter. Even good hackles are scarce. I don't think there is one good cockerel out of over 100 expensive eggs I got two friends to incubate for me; only about 25 eggs hatched. Most sportsmen, even fly fishers, seem to have no notion of the proper feathers for flies; with the birds in their hands they discard the useful feathers and send a mass of trash. I gave one man (for instance) a complete outfit of a new fly rod reel. Frazer line, etc. He handled every sort of duck and game bird, but he never could get the idea. Out of great masses of feathers, I would pick a few that could be used. It is so exasperating.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.  
Nov. 29th, 1914

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I have subscribed to the *Outers Book* for you. This magazine has been so practical the past year, and I have found so many really interesting articles in it, that I think you will like it. Its headquarters

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

have been moved to Chicago and it looks as if it was going to develop into a bigger magazine. Since that Louisiana man was obliged to sell out his control of *Recreation* to the old editor and another man, the magazine has taken on new life, and is far more interesting. The weeklies like *Forest and Stream* and the *American Field* have a big advantage over the monthlies, if they knew how to make the best use of them. *Forest and S.* had the field almost to itself, for years, and should have been a big flourishing paper by this time. Instead of enlarging they cut it down, and allowed Hough to go to save a salary of \$120 per month. He was devoted to the paper and was a great sporting writer. He has since made a fortune by his works.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

Dec. 11, 1914

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I wish that I had been able to get that book of J. Harrington Keene's at once. It would have shown you a lot of simple materials and probably the simplest way to tie flies. If you learn to tie a good fly that way, it is easier, I fancy, to go on to others. The leveling up of a strip of feather, as shown by Ward, is used a great deal, as it is quick, saves time and trouble. You can take right and left feathers, and slips from each. It is of course more troublesome. One book that was burned had a lot of good plain stuff in it by a young man who died just after writing it. You must expect trouble in winging; waxed silk is *the* thing to *tie with*.

Go slow and it will come to you. It is a matter of fingering. I tied without a vise until I read Halford, and was influenced by him. Sorry that I did not stick to the fingers, now, but vise is easier.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

Dec. 16, 1914

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Do not return the Leonard West book until quite through with it. It covers a great deal of ground, and many of the streams he fishes ap-

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

proximate our mountain streams in many ways. In learning to work my "Underwood" I wrote a few articles, and sent a couple of little ones to Chicago. One of those appeared in the *American Field* last week, and I will send it to you. Yes—this is surely good weather, and should brace a fellow up. Since feeling better I enjoy reading very much. *All Out Doors* seems a fine magazine, but everything depends on the Editor or chief executive. He should be a man of much experience and ability, and devoted to the interest of his paper. The few weeklies would have a great advantage if they had the best leadership. *Forest and Stream* does not advance, and the *American Field* is conservative.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

December 4, 1914

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

To tie good flies takes time and patience. I learned everything I know from books and can tie all sorts of flies, in all sorts of ways. It is a work of time to collect a decent lot of stuff for trout flies. Salmon fly materials are very expensive. The flies are tedious, troublesome, but lovely things. At one time I sent a few to every salmon fisher I knew, in this country, and abroad.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

November 23, 1914

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . The Underwood machine is certainly a dandy and my cousin deserves much credit for getting such a good one at a reduction.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

November 16, 1914

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . I wish I had had a good typist for 20 minutes to give me a starter on the Underwood machine. I am very stupid about mechan-

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

ics of any sort. I bought a fresh box of shells thinking I could shoot this month, but I don't dare venture.

The weather has broken at last and we may feel real cold weather.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

December 18, 1914

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I got a copy of *Field and Stream* today with a card saying they would send the magazine for 3 months for 25 cents. That will give me four copies, 4 months, for a quarter, cheap enough. The Underwood typewriter is certainly fine. I have gradually picked up what I wanted to know. Today I put in a new dark purple ribbon, in place of old one, as I want transcripts to be very distinct. The color shows up well. The *World's Work* published a war number in September and today a cousin sent me another for Nov. They are both very good. I hope that the Germans will not sink or capture some books I am having made in England. It may take some time to make them, and I pray that there will be no mistake, as I would have to stand the loss. That was quite a raid the German cruisers made on the English sea side resort. Learboro is a big place, and lots of fishing is done there. There is strategy behind such a move. It is not just to scare noncombatants in England. I have just been reading of a 6¾ Brown trout that won a *Field and Stream* prize, but would not fight. Grabbed the fly at the angler's feet.

Good luck to you. I may be able to send you some decent feathers.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

December 21, 1914

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I am sending you in box a lot of *paired* wings (wild duck), so you can tie right and left wings on your flies if you wish. They were collected or saved for me by a good sportsman, certainly one of the most persevering I know. He and his wife must be hardy, as they went to Cape Cod in zero weather to spend the holidays and shoot sea



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

fowl. Good Lord! It makes me shiver to think of it. It is cold work any time, even early in the season.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.  
January 1, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I trust that you are enjoying this perfect New Years Day, and that your outlook for the future is bright. You remember that I told you of a book that I have wished to read ever since publication, but the price was too high, one guinea, and it only dealt with salmon fishing, "The Salmon Fly," by Kelson. Well—day before yesterday I had a letter from Mr. Marston, in London, kindly giving me some information about an account of the Battle of the Sea of Japan, and he went on to say that he was sending me a copy of "The Salmon Fly," as a little present. I hope it arrives all right. I hope to feel like making some flies by February. Now I drive the typewriter. Received a lot of nice things Christmas. This week a fine big box arrived *anonymously*, by Express. *Forest and Stream's* last issue strikes me unfavorably but I am not on the inside. I fear they will lose the position they have held, which was gained under the old management when George Bird Grinnell held a large interest.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.  
January 8, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Writers in *Outers Book* had muddled the light rod business, giving England credit for their introduction here and abroad. I could not stand for that, so wrote at once, and the Editor published in first number. Some English catalogues are most convenient, particularly those in form of a small book, Hardy's Catalogue is really valuable but they brag a lot and claim everything.

You will have no trouble after getting a good vise and will be easily satisfied until you get a good deal of skill, then you begin to get fussy.

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

The *Outers Book* is really one of the most practical sensible magazines we have. The new *Forest and Stream* is out. Looks very well, but they are throwing away a lot of prestige as a weekly. They have a short article of mine on shooting woodcock in tall corn, in Ohio, in August and September. It was great snapshooting. You had to find fields with low spots in them.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

January 13, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

By accident I discovered that a fig eaten after supper will stop tickling in the throat at night, and keep it lubricated. Good thing to know.

Cave was making such a fine magazine of *Recreation*. He is said to be well posted and a very hard worker.

I see no show now for a great weekly for America, equal to the British *Field* in influence and income. I had given up the idea that *Forest and Stream* could do it several years ago. I wish that I could find some old photographs of the country about where the Shokan lake will be. I used to consider it, where the mountains spread apart, one of the most beautiful sections of the Catskills. It will be all a waste until they cover the devastated country with water, turning it into a large lake. As usual Halsey got his two bucks, the last a magnificent fellow, of which he sent me a photograph. The "Salmon Fly" entertains me, but it is extremely heavy and clumsy. The author, George McKelson, is an enthusiast, of lifelong experience, but is full of notions and ideas, some of which are far-fetched. He can brag beautifully.

I have sent to New York to try to buy Admiral Mahan's second book on "Sea Power." I read it 15 years ago, but do not remember accurately.

They are most interesting books. The "Life of Nelson" more so than any novel. I simply had to know a thing or two. I am still after an acct. of the battle of Tsushima (1905), that gives the strategy and tactics of the Japanese Admiral Togo. It could be very instructive just

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

now. There must be something of the sort in Washington, but I don't know whom to write to there.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

January 20, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I have just found a very rare hook, such as is made by local blacksmiths for the Indians in British Columbia waters. I enclose this hook and two very large hand forged sea hooks. Will you be kind enough to have these photographed *to size*, and let me know the cost. The Indian hook is particularly interesting. I had a few of the big hand forged and sent all of them except these two to a friend at Santa Catalina Island, California. He was much pleased and used them in the big fish there. Hardy made a wonderful big spoon to imitate a flying fish, and I sent it to my friend. He said it was the greatest spoon he ever saw. It was strongly and beautifully made, and spun perfectly. Hardy can do fine work when he puts his best men on it . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

January 19, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I could not imagine what that package of fried figs was! Knight may go to Liberty tomorrow. Twenty-five years ago, and for some years after, crewels were imported from the Far East, Persia, etc. and some of them were beautiful. They were dyed in ancient Asiatic dyes, and made of young angora, or something very fine *in the best*. I found the best and bought a large quantity of every color, and taking some of each for use, I stored the balance in a white canvas sack, in a relative's garret, with a few worthless articles. When I had used up the most useful colors I went back to this reserve stock, but it had been stolen or thrown out. A friend found a little second rate crewel and sent me some. If you keep your eyes open you may find a lot in

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

some little shop. The good is absolutely fast and bright in water. I enclose two hanks which my friend sent to me. It is pretty good but not in color. I send so that you will know the stuff. I first found it in scraps on the porch of a summer hotel and traced it to a lady who was doing fancy work.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, via Liberty, N. Y.

January 26, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I find that I have an exceptionally good lot of white tipped wild drake right and left. These are used for wings on several celebrated Scotch lake flies, and in this country in the Adirondacks. I never tried them on these streams, but they would probably kill on a Coachman body.

I will send them to you as you have room at home. Put in box with a few moth balls, use what you like. I may ask you for a pair or two some time, for Adirondack flies. Everything has to go into my trunk. Boxes take up much room, and it is astonishing how good envelopes, etc., weigh. The trunk is like lead or was last time I used it. Yet there were very few heavy clothes. The December number of *Recreation* was the best ever. Better than January and February, I fancy, but *Forest and Stream's* incursion has forced them to reduce subscription from \$3.00 to \$1.50. I don't think they can afford this with the expensive paper and fine illustrations they use. *Forest and Stream* reduced its price as a monthly to \$1.00. Now we have only one weekly in the country, *The American Field*.

THEODORE GORDON

P.S. If it would not inconvenience you I think it would help me to send you, in a box, any surplus stuff, and things I do not use at present. You see for 25 years I have tried to have materials for a few standard salmon flies, bass and lake flies, much of which is not used on these streams and it crowds my trunk.

I have just received *Field and Stream* for February but it is the last I will get. Please send March to me to read.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Bradley, N. Y.

January 27, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Did you notice that box of white tip drake? I think they are the best I have seen for a long time. They are sure to be useful sooner or later. The shops are often compelled to substitute dull white tip turkey feathers.

I got in touch with the Editor of a magazine devoted to the Navy in Washington, and he hopes to get me what I want. Don't bother about it. I was forced to *buy* Mahan's second book on "Sea Power." It is very interesting and his life of Nelson more so than any novel. I want that, but expect to do without. I read them all many years ago but my memory is not sufficiently accurate to quote. I have to have the book.

I do hope that they [Unclear which rod makers—Ed.] will make a success of the little rod I am having made. It is such a lottery, as you never know what you will get, so much depends on the bamboo that goes into it.

A N. Y. man bought a \$35.00 rod last spring and it put his hand out so that he can not cast well with anything, yet he had won prizes in dry-fly competition. I am busy at something all the time and dead tired at night.

THEODORE GORDON

February 2

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Cooper never used mohair for the female Beaverkill, always wool. You may find the shade in any fancy goods store. There is a sort of wool that is very soft and fuzzy. I had just the correct shade for F. B. light Cahill, etc. but used it up, and since then have had to take stuff a bit *too dark*. Some wools in pale shades have very good effects but are usually so poorly dyed that they soon fade when exposed to sun and air. That is the beauty of the far Eastern crewels—the dye is fast. They may not appear much better than wool when first used but soon show this superiority. When you can not get the mohair you need take wool.

THEODORE GORDON

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

February 3, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

When one has to write anything he wishes to say he must spoil some paper.

There is a device in Jamison catalogue that looks very good to me. It is Fluegel's Spooler, and is said to do the work perfectly. Think of having the line perfectly spooled before each cast, the comfort of it, and the saving in backlashes. But it cost \$3.00. So I pass it up. One of these days I may get one.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

February 5, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Please go wherever you like and see if you can get a few dozen big, long shanked Carlisle, or other long shanked hooks with metal rings, for eyes. Of course the eye is straight in these hooks. Try to get good bends, barbs and points.

I want them for various purposes. For pork rind, pickerel belly, and *big* Bumblepuppy flies. For some reason these last have not seemed to kill as well as the last few years, but this may be due in part to the manner in which my patterns have been copied by the shops. I sent a regular Bumblepuppy to an amateur flytyer and bass fisher in Ohio, and it immediately established itself as a prime favorite.  $\frac{3}{4}$  of his bass have been killed with it, or on slight modification of the pattern to suit the condition of the water. They have, it seems, some thousands of bass fishers in Columbia, Ohio. Of course, they fish every way, but many stick to the fly rod and big flies, in preference to the . . . casting rod and bait.

THEODORE GORDON

Sunday, February 7, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I love to give when I know that I am meeting some desire, or wish. It is one of the greatest pleasures in the world.

It may seem queer, but now that I have the articles on "Hooks"

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

and the photographs, do not want to send it to any one. [See page 381, for this article.—Ed.] Getting the photographs of those “Modele Perfects” satisfied me, and I like to take the whole business out of its envelope and look over it.

One magazine wanted it for January, but they know so little about tackle and sport (at least the proofreaders), that they often make wretched mistakes.

THEODORE GORDON

P.S. Where La B. is writing of his own experience, and his own theories he is most interesting, but when he gets off on the books he has read (English) I do not care for it.

These books are bound to have a powerful influence on any man for a good many years. I bought Halford's first two books in 1889 and 1890 or 1891, and was saturated with his ideas. I had a rod built that nearly killed me, and imported a large quantity of best English flies. For years I never dared go fishing without that box of flies to use over rising trout. Then suddenly I discovered that my own flies actually killed *better*, and I was sorry in many ways.

Bradley, N. Y.

February 8, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Athenian's writings began in the columns of the *Field* and were always interesting. I had a fine edition of his book which was burned in the Liberty fire (also “Dry Fly Fishing in Theory and Practice,” 1st edition, and “Dry Fly Entomology.” The former can not be replaced, but I am in hopes of getting a second hand copy of the last.)

McClelland's (Athenian) book has been selling right along in the cheap edition, and is very useful. He was a very young man when he died of tuberculosis, only about 21 years, I think, but he had devoted all his time to fishing, etc.

Val Conson (Skucs) did rather a plucky thing some years ago. He worked out a system of *wet* fly fishing for the chalk dry fly streams, and killed many trout when the dry fly would not work. Then he published a book on “Minor Tactics of the Chalk Streams” that stirred up all the prejudice in the dry fly ranks. Mr. Halford was particularly

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

fierce, and gave V.C. (of course not mentioning him) the devil in his last book. I was very sorry as Halford had always been so fair for over 20 years, but he was growing old; for years he had fished only certain preserved lengths of the Test and Itchen. He was recognized as *the* great authority, and had become a bit prejudiced and dictatorial. He was tremendously opposed to light rod.

THEODORE GORDON

English woodcock [enclosed]

P.S. There was not a croak of dry fly for years after I began. Halsey started in 1896 or 1897 and fancied he got it from me, but I think he thought it out for himself. Halford was the one supreme authority, and I tackled a new art *by myself*.

*A talk, not a letter.*

Bradley, N. Y.

February 9, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

You can discontinue the Sunday papers after this, as I find that the *Weekly Digest* gives me all that I require.

While I lived South there were periods when I could not wet a line for two years, although I made up for it by spending a couple of months on the streams when I did get North. I worked out very successful flies for bass but that was not trout fishing.

If business was so good that I could not get away I tried to console myself by reading all the fishy books I could get. There was an Englishman on Nassau St., N. Y. who had lots of old books on fishing and some modern ones and I had a special arrangement with him. If I had bought the most expensive and kept them until now there would have been a large profit in them. I remember Luyster offering me a unique book at a discount of \$5.00. "Flees and Flce Making for Trout," from an old (120 years old, yet flies were very good) manuscript, by W. H. Aldam. It was a real curiosity, with the actual flies shown in medallions together with the materials used in making the imitation.

I hope some one will find a second hand copy of "Dry Fly Entomology" to replace the copy burned at Liberty. I particularly want the



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

directions and receipts for dyeing. The Entomology part has too many small Ephemera, the small sorts found on the chalk streams. On our mountain streams we have great numbers of the caddis, and perlidae, also many good sized flies.

I am afraid to begin fly making just yet, as I am too easily exhausted, particularly, it seems to me, when I am much interested in what I am doing. What do you think of the monthly form of *Forest & Stream*? It is much better than I expected.

This is such a fine cold day it makes one feel quite strong. Glad to hear that your severe cold is busted up.

I did not get my *Field* last week (now received); must follow it up right away. I am glad that there is one weekly left and will have to continue the temporary subs I made for six months only.

Some baits are badly armed; the two little minnows I bought . . . have such big single hooks (three) that they will never spin in a lake unless dragged very fast. A friend of mine in South Carolina wanted a minnow, so I bought a thundering big one (his bass ran up to 12 pounds). It was armed in this same way. He reported that there never was a better bait for getting *strikes* but no one could hook one fish in *ten strikes*.

Much the same story is told in the *Outers Book* for February, see page 153. *Outers* is the most practical magazine of the lot in some respects. I feel like talking this morning, but have to take it out writing. The Japanese gut I sent Cave [*Recreation Magazine*] is 72 feet 6 inches long.

When I get Sir Edward Grey on "Dry Fly Fishing" will lend it to you. I think that it will be good. He uses a powerful Hardy rod; see their catalogue. If there is a decent place to stay while fishing, that lake above De Bruce is a nice one. I forget the name as I have not been there for years. The boarders at De Bruce never brought in any bass until about the middle of August. I wish that we could have such trout fishing as we had in 1906 and 1907. It was very fine on all three streams. I fished the Neversink and Beaverkill in '06 and Neversink and Willowemoc in '07. Fine sport and so many large trout, and the average was excellent. I have talked myself out, so will quit.

THEODORE GORDON

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

P.S. For instance, I took 11 trout out of Knight's pool between 1:30 and 3 o'clock p.m. that weighed full 9 pounds. All ran even except one 16 inch trout.

The priest at Livingston Manor is a great fisher. Mr. Ward said he told him that he killed 800 trout last season. He has a small automobile.

I enclose a few Summer D. You will need a few *light* Cahills easily made, and a very useful floater. My stock is old and where to get more I do not know. It is a lovely feather.

February 10, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I was glad to send you some more S. D. feathers. Don't forget to tie a few *light* Cahills, with gray body. Wool will do all right.

THEODORE GORDON

February 11, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

If the light was extra good I could, I believe, tie flies for an hour or two in the evening, as supper is my best meal. I dislike red deer fat or any kind of grease on my line, but I got a dressing called Mucilin from a Mr. Aspinall, in Bolton, 1 doz. boxes; gave most of them to friends, and all liked the stuff. I kept a worn out line going last season with it by dressing before I went out. He is a nice man who has a big chemist's business. This is just a little side line. I enclose a few Modele Perfect, without eyes. I attached strong single gut loops to the others and tied flies on them. Good.

THEODORE GORDON

February 11, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Turn to pages 249-250-251-252 of Hardy's Catalogue for their light rods. About 1904 they were forced by patriotic Englishmen to try to equal American light but powerful rods, and plenty of Leonards and Paynes were sent to them as patterns.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

The Judges at the trial said that both Allcock and Hardy equalled the American rods, but some good dry-fly men do not think so. I am dead tired. Have not tied a fly yet, and have so many other things to do. Received a beautiful lot of colored pictures of the City of London from Mr. Marston this afternoon. They are very fine, and such a big bunch.

Hildebrant sent me samples of his *black* line. Looks good but I don't claim to be expert on the up-to-date bait-casting line . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

February 11, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

There is a great amount of vibration in the table I use for type-writing, etc. It is bad for the machine, and unpleasant. Do you know of a little solid table second hand that could be had very cheap? . . .

I had a most interesting letter from Halsey yesterday with account of killing a 26 inch trout and 87 pound shark near New York. He says that there is an enormous brute under a big boulder above Phoenicia that sticks close to its hole and nothing he can use will keep it out. He has been smashed up 3 times in 2 years. He is one of the all day all night fisherman, but he can only snatch a few days from his work. I sent you a little packet of feathers from my stock that may interest you, and some . . . other things.

THEODORE GORDON

P.S. I am still terribly thin. Have to diet too much. The best fun of any of the fishing books I got in Savannah was one by a Scotch professional fisherman called, "The Angler and the Loop Rod." The author knew it all. He went for Mr. Pennell and scalped him bald headed; then presented his own flies as perfect imitations. They were killing wet flies on Tweed and Clyde, but very simple. The only proper way to fish was with a 14 foot spliced rod, 15 foot leader, 9 flies in the day time, six flies at night. Wish I had kept that book.

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

February 12, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Do you know of any lead in thin sheets, any size, soft, and easily handled? The point is to make a hook travel upside down when you wish. Almost any thin flexible lead would do. I did this years ago, so it can be done.

I got played out before lunch and had to eat a very little and drink a glass of milk before I felt better. I will be working cheerfully at something and this goneness will suddenly grab me. When I have to go thro the rearranged materials again I may find some stuff worth sending you. Lord, how I did give away stuff when I used to get nearly all of it myself. I would get a nice lot of feathers, and never imagine that I would never have a chance to procure more. I used to have the pick of hundreds of Philadelphia Capons, and sometimes found wonderful hackles. I got one Capon that had the only perfect pure yellow duns I ever saw, but there were only a few hackles small enough for 10 and 12 hooks, tho bird was very big. I sent off the little story, but it will come back. I don't know anything about fiction now, on these story magazines.

I am sending for two more of the cheap pipes. My friends like them. I have used them a lot myself. They look like French briar and amber, but must be imitation, but so well finished up. Another thaw and rain, probably. Thermometer 46.

THEODORE GORDON

P.S. I got one copy of the *Field*, anyhow. I had sent 25 cents to a friend for one and it arrived today. The war has knocked out much of its advertising. Hildebrandt publishes a nice little catalogue. What do you think of his black lines? For the South, at least, I prefer black to any other color; white is the worst, and shows up in a horrible way in almost any water.

Take salmon flies. I have a devilish tough time tying one now, after so many years on dry flies. They are absolutely different in method, and the fingering on salmon flies extremely difficult.

I have been hard at work for three hours copying a Jock Scott salmon fly (one of Forrest's) when I was learning to make them. But

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

they are such lovely things, and so fine for presents, that if I had not found it practically impossible to import the finest stuff and the expense so great, I should have continued making them. I would not rest satisfied until my flies equalled the very best professional work. After that the oldest anglers were glad to use them, and were grateful for present; once when I was hard up I tied 3 doz. and got \$18.00 for them.

THEODORE GORDON

P.S. A thought: A little care would lengthen the lives of our expensive air pump dressed lines several years. For instance some simple kind of large wood reel or skeleton, so that we could roll off the lines quickly and easily, and keep them off the small reels from 1st September to the 1st of April. My careless ways alone spoiled one end of my best line, after three years use, and it suited me exactly. Christian spent a couple of hours with me this afternoon and I was glad he came as I was not fit to work, and was a bit depressed by my news.

You can shade your Cahill hackles from red to light brown. It is a most useful fly. You are getting on fine with your tying. More modern work than the North Carolina man, who fishes wet.

I sent 20 cents to Hildebrandt for the two pictures of two big fish. Big mouth bass and mascollange. The latter must have been finely mounted, and I shall love to have it.

THEODORE GORDON

Would like to take mascollange on stout fly tackle, and an enormous Bumblepuppy fly. One would have to have 100 yards of line.

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Many years ago I got acquainted with a conductor on the P.R.R. and he was continually blowing about a trout stream that flows into the Lunnemsboning (?) river, called Young Woman's Creek. At last three of us got the fever so bad we had to go and we travelled a devilish long way to get there, arrived at night and put up at a lumberman's boarding house. We were so excited over prospects of great fishing that we could not sleep much.

In the morning we learned that there was no fishing until you went

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

10 miles up stream, and that the lumbermen were skinning every bit of lumber. Also that there was no fly-fishing until July. We traveled the 10 miles and cast our flies; one of the party after hours of casting did take one trout on fly. He had made a split bamboo rod himself, the weakest thing you ever saw, and both tip and butt were smashed by this ½ lb. fish. I met a Philadelphia angler and he confirmed the tale of no fly fishing until July. Said there were no insects until then. He gave me a few worms, and I found one place the lumbermen could not disturb, ran way under a lot of drift and trash. Out of that I extracted 11 trout, up to half a pound, but in most of the pools there were only a few little things. The lumber drivers were awful. A big head of water and logs could be had behind gates that opened to bottom of a dam. Then gates would be opened and the logs and flood of water would tear down stream, smashing everything en route. They had built a gravity road out of wooden rails and had a string of cars on it loaded with logs. We were so tired that we got on this and rode down. I never was so scared in my life. The others said their hair stood on end. They were so sick they would not stay until morning. We ate our dozen trout for supper and got on a late train for Locknaren, where we put up at a comfortable commercial hotel. The next morning I was sitting alone (before breakfast) in the travelers' room. When the landlord came in, he said that he had heard we had a rotten time at Young Woman's Creek, and I said, "Yes, we had."

Then he asked if I was a good fly fisher, and I said I thought I was fair. He told me that a friend of his had just opened a new hotel at Bellefonte; that he was all ready for the summer business, but it was May and he had few guests. He said there were lots of trout but highly educated; that Bellefonte had a population of 3,000, and everybody fished. The stream after being joined by another flowed right thro the town.

I braced up and thanked him. Hope returned but at breakfast I could do nothing with the two other boys. They were bound to go home and home they went. I on the contrary took the branch railroad up to Bellefonte. Found everything as described by the kind landlord. Had a lovely room, 11 waiters, and excellent meals any time I wanted them. Stayed a week and never had a better time. One day

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

I killed 40 trout but none over 1 lb. (They had me described and my fishing in the paper.)

There was much perfect dry fly water. The stream required special small flies that were tied by a man at Kriders', Philadelphia. I found an expert angler who was crippled by rheumatism and bought most of his flies.

Sometimes I was beaten. I went one afternoon to a new dam with a splendid native angler. The water was rather shallow and  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. trout were rising everywhere. We tried and tried to no effect, until my friend found a solitary pale yellow dun, very small. He cast to the rising fish and in a short time filled his basket, 43 trout. He had only the one fly. At least I went below the dam and caught 8 trout.

THEODORE GORDON

P.S. From the Magnetic Springs we went to Grand Haven and across the lake to Milwaukee. It was a cross sea that night, and we were in one of those immensely long lake steamers, with all the machinery in the stern. I never saw a sicker lot of passengers. We only remained at Milwaukee a couple of days, and then went to Oconomocas, Wis., a great resort for Chicago people and anglers. The whole country is full of beautiful lakes, 44 of them in it, and the town is on a large one, "Lake la Belle." Some men came all the way from Chicago just to fish Sundays.

I tried the fishing in the approved style of the place. A steady, flat bottom boat built for the work, guide, etc. Comfortable arm chair in stern of boat, bait provided.

My "guide" was a nice fellow and eager to show sport. He first baited my hook with minnow and chucked it in, advising slow trolling while we were going to good water.

When I struck a bass, I brought it up to the boat. The guide arose, netted the fish, and rebaited. I had nothing to do but let out line and reel in again, but it was pleasant for a change. I was terribly disappointed over two dog fish of 8 and 10 lbs. Thought they were mascollange or very big bass. We caught enough bass though we fished la Belle close to the village or town, but it is a big lake. Cost, guide, \$3.00, bait \$1.00, boat .50-\$4.50, per day.

THEODORE GORDON

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

February 14, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Please get me a skein of the brightest red silk you can buy for Royal Coachmen. What I have left is so very dark when wet. It is always most difficult to get the light colored and bright shades of a color. I have never cared for green bodies, yet they are very useful at times. Some of my friends on the Beaverkill got after me for a sort of dun I had tied with soft fur and pale green crewel. It killed so well on Beaverkill. Then it killed here. At last I found that there was a lot of little insects. I forget whether they were caddis or perlidae with greenish bodies about that year. The fish did not care much here whether the flies were 10-12 or 14, but on the Beaverkill they preferred the smaller sizes. Then they muddled this fly up with the old "Bonnie View," and all the Bonnie Views that are sold now by the shops come from a single pattern sent me by Halsey years ago. I think that the man who tied it in the first instance was thinking of the English Olive Cowdung.

It is most curious how patterns multiply. Now Halsey uses a Bonnie View with a *dark* green body, rough, and kills lots of fish with it. I know that I could not use the fly with any confidence.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

February 15, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Years ago there was a boom in Magnetic Spring water in Michigan and my Mother was ordered there to drink the waters. It was almost like a gold strike, 3,000 people, many with attendants, had come for the waters, and there were no proper hotels. They were building but the place was jammed. We were lucky in getting into a nice new house, good cook, etc.

I expected no fishing but had an old fly rod, reel and line with me. There was a little river and a big half-lake, half-swamp, with broad, deep channels, wandering around a new hotel. I got back of it and found that one of the biggest channels was made in there and



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

ran along firm ground. The water was dark, but clear. Soon I saw a large black shadow glide from behind a stump and swim out into deep water. I ran home for rod and tried to get some minnows. Caught a few with kitchen flies and small hook, but all too big to use with fly rod. Had to cast from coils on ground. Could just get across to best water; with such big baits had to give lots of time. Presently the line began to slip thru the rings. I gave about 20 feet, then struck. In a moment a big bass was in the air. After a fine bit of sport, it proved to weigh  $4\frac{3}{4}$  lbs. I killed five from  $2\frac{3}{4}$  to  $4\frac{3}{4}$  and then minnows gave out and could not get more. However, I had lots of fish for all the boarders and for a couple next door. I had a lot of good fishing on that little river and in the marshy lake. Such fine bass and a few nice pickerel of about 3 lbs. each.

Such an unexpected strike was delightful. I kept the house in fish all the time. The old man did not wish to accept board from me. What do you think of that?

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

February 18, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . The river was away up after the last big thaw. The best time to see fish was on the big January rise when the trout ran into the Bennie Kills to get out of the torrent . . . The strength of a good "Cuttyhunk" flax line of small diameter is wonderful. I remember playing a devil fish three miles, from 11 A.M. to 5:30 P.M., and it towed two boats and three men with the greatest ease by the Cuttyhunk line. The hook was a forged Virginia which I had been using for sheephead. They were strong, never had one break. I found a short article on the Chesowiska, a west coast Florida river, short and small. The author is a well known Atlanta lawyer, who sent me the article some years ago . . . The little rivers that rise in great springs afford great sport in their estuaries. Wonderful variety of fish. There are 5 rivers that I remember on a comparatively short stretch of the coast. You can take many fish on big gaudy flies.

THEODORE GORDON

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

February 23, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

*Golden Pheasant Crests:*

I will find big ones. I know I have them somewhere. They are for salmon flies but sprigs make exquisite tails for flies with pale yellow bodies. When used in sprigs they are brittle and one should put on about five. They will last. Two or three soon break off.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

February 23, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . Years ago Abbey and Imbrie had a very fine man in charge of their Retail Department, Wm. H. Holberton. He had been an artist of some means. He was a fine fisher and kept everything in their store up to a high standard. Then he attracted the patronage of many of the very best anglers in the country.

A dozen of the lovely salmon flies I used to tie were on exhibition in one of the show cases for years. Men would come in and want to buy them, and the salesman would say, "Those are only samples of *amateur* work and are not for sale." They were about perfect, as at that time I had excellent materials. There is something about flies tied by fishermen which makes them look right and play tight. But it is hard work tying salmon flies and hard on the nerves. Of course it is not for a professional who has been trained to it, and works almost without thought. This enclosure is a tipped feather from a Golden Pheasant. Two or three sprigs make a nice tail for a trout fly and they are used in sea trout, lake and salmon flies. This is an Irish feather. . . .

THEODORE GORDON

February 24, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I am positive that I have some very large crests, [larger than one enclosed—Ed.] and naturally the sprigs are stronger. Then there is a difference in coloring. I want the pure *gold* when I can get it for salmon flies. (Crest over wing and crest tail) . . .

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Christian was up yesterday afternoon and more little things came in while he was here. He was much interested. I told him that I always forgot to show both Bruce and himself something when they were here and sure enough, he had scarcely departed when I saw the new patent Keep Em Alive Fish. Stranger, I had hung it on the door so that it was prominent, but I never saw it, until after he had gone . . .

THEODORE GORDON

February 24, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I made such a perfect collection of everything in Savannah, but only a little of each article. When I was north a friend who had the best most perfect 10 foot Leonard rod I ever handled offered to give it to me for 45 dozen flies, and another friend begged me to fill up a box and large fly book with flies all moth eaten or used up. I was idle at the time and jumped at the chance to get that rod on any terms. How I did enjoy fishing with it. It is not a poor rod now, tho so old and a servant once moved a wardrobe on it when it had fallen down, shortening tip and middle joint. It was far better finished and handsomer than present-day rods. It was *individual*.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

February 25, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

The writer Zane Gray tells a tale of taking forty 4 to 5 pounds just to crush some important tenderfeet who doubted his stories. One by one he threw four pound small mouth bass into the river, before the astonished eyes of these tenderfeet. I had to work for all the bass I ever got in Delaware, but then I really fished with fly, not with a combination of fly, spinner and wriggly pork, which *is not* fly fishing, no matter what you call it . . .

I have tried several tin boxes for fly material, one the largest and best cost \$5.00, years ago. Did not like them. But there is a wood frame, leather covered box in Abbey and Imbrie's catalogue that I think would do if it has depth enough and can be arranged. One must

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

use envelopes, at least I must, and there should be a long space full length of box to take strong, cheap, regular envelopes. The one that has the flap (instead of tray) *in cover*, would probably be best. As for the tray one could subdivide that to suit himself and his needs. One requires something that he can carry on short trips, and that will hold enough varied stuff to tie any pattern or imitation required.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

February 25, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . These attractive catalogues are a nuisance, one sees so many useful things.

I thought that a very small sum would cover all these small accessories, swirls, sinkers, snaps, snells, short wire leaders and all the small things that one often needs but never has, but there is no end to them when you study a catalogue . . . Abercrombie and Fitch do business in style . . . I will find a piece of the old Mary crewel to send you. One that shows the beautiful bright color, which was *fast* in all colors . . . I used to haunt Washington Market and vicinity and occasionally picked up something worth while. Once a half dozen coots. Again on the street a big pale blue gull, and I had one place where I could pick lots of capons, mostly too big and coarse but I sometimes found a treasure. At Christmas tide, all sorts of foreign game birds were on sale (at high prices) even capercaillie, the great grouse of Norway and Sweden (big as our turkey).

THEODORE GORDON

February 26, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . The 10 foot rod [Abbie and Imbrie "Hand Made" Empire City rod, 7 oz.—Ed.] is the one Christian bought two weeks ago. In rods of this class there is some luck. You may strike a batch of extra good cane, and have a very superior rod for the money. Again it may only be ordinary, without that nervous resiliency most Americans like. Bruce [Le Roy] can fish either hand. At the big pool at the Mill

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

(none now) there used to be a sort of shelf on the rock. Bruce used to walk along this leaning back, and cast a short line, skimming his drop flies. I have seen him kill two trout at once, good ones. He used a sort of left handed or back handed cast, and he is really left handed in many ways.

He can cast well with a rod of any action. Christian is also a great expert, and has more patience and perseverance than any other man I ever met. This is the secret of his big fish. That and going for them *at the correct time*. I think he deserves the big trout he catches and am glad to see them when he brings them to me to show.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y.

February 26, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . That new Rush minnow is an odd bird. It swims tail first. I will be glad to see you Saturday. The last ribbon [On that infernal typewriter—Ed.] I bought was badly put on reel to start with, much twist on end. Then after going a distance working the machine another twist showed up. I have managed to run this same distance toward one end, and fancy I will have to let it go at that, for I see no way of getting it out.

Abbey and Imbrie agree with me that the nearest approach to a Tournament rod they make is in their Empire City "Hand Made," 10 foot rod. It is powerful and good rod. I used one all day in a high wind on the Esopus. If a man was clever enough to take off the ferules and *reset* them the rod would last longer, as making a rod in quantities they are often a little careless in fitting the ferules over the wood.

THEODORE GORDON

P.S. Man alive—you know I went up to \$2.25 on a Heddon rod to get over 5 feet. Well, it came this afternoon and a nicer looking, handier little tool for casting and trolling one would hardly want. It is stiff and light as a feather. I never saw a cheap rod finished so well and the guides are file proof metal as hard as an agate. How the devil do they do it?

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

I believe that it is just about as old Mr. Whipple put it. He said that he could make a good living making split bamboo rods at \$7.50 to \$10.00 each, and finish them up in good style. I doubted this as his taste in rods was peculiar, stiff as pokers in butt and middle and soft in tips, but he had his own way of wet-fly fishing and it suited *him*.

March 3, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Mr. Marston thinks he can pick up a copy of a book that was burned in Liberty for 10/10. I enclose check for \$2.90 which may be correct . . . I want the book for a few directions for dycing feathers in it, but must have the Second Edition, as these directions are not in the First Edition.

It became so bitter cold last night, and I had to get up so often that I felt badly this morning. My bedroom is cold as Greenland now. I hope you will be very careful of that cold. The "grip" that knocked me began with congestion of the right lung and it was two months before it was entirely well.

THEODORE GORDON

I am writing on my knee.

March 4, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Is there anything you need? You know I picked up this collection \* with a view to giving part of it to anglers who might require something. I sent a few things to a couple of Neversinkers this morning. I have all the little things nearby. Everything that I could find that is so often needed and rarely in one's possession when wanted.

THEODORE GORDON

March 5, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . There is quite some work to be done, and I have not time or strength to do one half the things I wish to. Do not judge by the

\* Gordon in this period put together a fabulous collection of fishing tackle, flies and lures, of all kinds. Many letters of his in 1914-15, for which there is no space here, were concerned with this hobby.—Ed.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

outside. When I read that part of your letter on the vast number of things I was getting and then looked at the green tin box, the minnow and the trifles from A. & F., I was compelled to laugh. The contrast between your idea and the reality was so great. I sent you the *Field*. It is spoiled a good deal by the war news, which *properly* has no place in it, but there are a few good things in it even now.

I see that A. and F. have those centrifugal hooks. Years ago I used a few and they were good; I ordered one dozen in gut. They are sharp and fine. I have large hooks in gut and [all the] swivels, sinkers, three way swivels, and every little thing of that sort I could think of. I have cut out too much work for myself on flies, etc. I travel behind a spinner or spoon. The Bumblepuppy is very good, dressed quite large. Out west they seem strong for the Red Fly or Scarlet Ibis bug. It is hard as stone, made like a bait. Another bright day. I hope your cold is in the discard.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, March 5, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Hooks are the devil. I buy a good many from Mills but they are Hall's up turned eye. I prefer these hooks usually for flies smaller than No. 12. At Claryville I ordered a lot of special fine wired, so called, Modele Perfect hooks made by Allcock of Reddich. They have a big bend and big twist but the quality is very good. Last Fall I ordered 2 sizes, without twist. You see, I have to take 1,000 of a size to get any at all and I am out a lot of money on a small assortment of hooks. For all small flies the Hall's eyed (turned up), made by Hutchinson, are best to my taste. They are the original dry fly hook worked out by Mr. H. S. Hall many years ago. Several of the best dry fly men in England assisted him with advice. They are not made over there of large size as they are used exclusively for floating flies, but here they are often used wet. They take such a good grip and hook well. But their qualities show up only in the small sizes.

THEODORE GORDON

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

March 5, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I am afraid that I will not be able to cast from the reel for some time. My last casting was done with big rods and quite heavy sinkers on the Coast in salt water. A different thing from bass casting. Darling is very strong on a good reel and easy starting. Have everything else (he says) as common and cheap as you please, but buy a good reel. He was very successful as a Tournament bait caster, with the short rod, and has had immense experience. In flies for bass he likes Red Ibis, Royal Coachman . . . and Babcock. I give his opinion at length as he is a very practical sort of man, but he is greatly prejudiced against some fine American and all English rods. I judge that he likes a very different kind of action. Wants his rod to spring from the butt.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley via Liberty, N. Y.

March 5, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . If you can get the right sort of attractors to spin before the bait or fly you can take pickrel when they seem very indifferent. . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Saturday, March 6, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I want to talk a little after breakfast while I am trying to brace up. I feel weak until I get a little warm stuff in me. . . . The Marble Gaff will be just the thing for Christian. He could not have lost that 10 or 12 lb lake trout if he had had it. It was cold and quite a sea for a small pond. The man with him was terribly clumsy, caught the line in the boat, then stuck the net under the completely exhausted fish and tried to lift it in. He broke the line and the big fish fell out of the small net. Christian brought me a 3 lb one he got, such solid, heavy fish and full of food, though it was just after ice broke up. Of course such a gaff looks qucer, but it is what we need for big fish, unless he carries a large and very strong net. . . .

THEODORE GORDON



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

March 7, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I have some exquisitely fine hooks Nos. 12 and 14. The 14's are about perfect but the 12's are a shade fine for the model and size. I can not afford to have a second lot made to order but this is a very perfect model, if it was made shorter for hard work.

I had to take a quantity to get them made and have parted with a great many to friends who fancied them. The 14's have killed many fish on the Beaverkill as a good many skilled anglers go in for small flies there. A little dark dun with orange bag of eggs was very killing for several seasons, then it played out. I was glad as it was very hard to get wings and the boys would have been quick to notice a substitution. A small yellow dun has killed very well but in some way they got to calling it a "Cowdung." The yellow fly you mention is plentiful in all these streams if weather is right. It is a member of the perlidæ and does not greatly enjoy cold windy weather. It killed well tied as a hackle but the color must be right. Saves a lot of bother dyeing wings to shade. The duns are usually a safe play early in the season. The fly that I think Cooper took the Female Beaverkill from is rather different in some respects from the imitation, but the latter kills, so it is all right.

I am very tired tonight, so many things turned up that I could not make flies as I wished. I did manage 4 after dinner. My Mother is the same, weak and sleepy but not in danger at present.

The chenille does not hold its color well. I shall be glad to crawl into bed, but it is too early yet, not 8 o'clock. Bed is a great institution.

THEODORE GORDON

Sunday, March 7th, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I don't know whether I told you, that at last, yesterday I received a letter from a real angler at Bellefonte. I had been trying to get information, on and off, for ten years. Now I know why I got no replies. In such a large town there are a great number of local anglers who are jealous of strangers, and want to keep all foreign fishermen from taking their trout. The Brown trout have taken possession of

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

the 2 streams that join just above and flow through the town. They get them up to 5 or 6 lbs. now and then, but many fish of 16-18, 19 inches are killed. All fish with fly. My informant sold 50 gross last spring but for the town Brown trout they use minnows on a special rig they make themselves.

There are plenty of native trout within 20 miles. One stream 18 miles out he describes as a fisherman's paradise, after you know it well. It is very large and flows between high mountains. A favorite place to camp out in summer. I had such a delightful week at Bellefonte when I was 18 or 19 years old. Good hotel, everybody kind, and lots of very shy trout. I had one big day when I got 40 just before going home.

I am glad to know modern conditions at last but my correspondent doesn't wish his name mentioned, as it would hurt his business if it was known that he was posting outsiders. He says that the show of big Brown trout on summer evenings makes your heart jump.

THEODORE GORDON

Monday, March 8, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I must spend at least a week at Kenosa Lake, if I am good for anything at all. It is just about my idea, I fancy, of a place where I can do my work and have a little fishing during the summer—if I could find a nice quiet place, with good sized room. Since the hot nights last July I have grown to hate very small rooms. Then I spend a good deal of time in my room. I am so glad to have beaten those jealous fishermen and got up to date information about Bellefonte. They have no public spirit at all.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y., March 9th, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Francis Francis was one of the great anglers of his time and he loved and practiced all sorts of fishing. Dry-fly fishing was practiced but the wet still had a strong hold in England. He was an expert at all kinds of fishing and his position as angling editor of the British

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

*Field* gave him many opportunities. He fished all over the United Kingdom and studied and copied the salmon flies of every river. I remembered that I had an old fly dresser's copy of his book on Angling. It is about every kind of fishing but there are about 90 good pages on fly fishing. I will send you the book presently to read. You will only care for the 90 pages, but I enjoy going over the formulas of the old time salmon flies he collected with so much pains. He was a great favorite with everyone, being an extremely genial, companionable man. Mr. Marston thinks that for England, Francis' book is the best ever written. He belonged to the Halford, Hall, etc., company of anglers, and they often fished together.

I knew that Theodore [cousin—Ed.] had a good, beautiful copy of this book in his library, so I did not hesitate to get it. I left a large number of angling and shooting books in a small library in the North Wing room for the benefit of the young anglers then growing up. It was a good selection. Among them was a first edition of "Floating Flies and How to Dress Them" by Halford. I saw that there was a demand from collectors for the book at a high price, so wrote Theodore to sell it if he could realize a good price, also to try to get out the black smirch of a match. I did not care for the illustrations, and I had got all I wanted about tying dry flies out of a little book by J. Ogden.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, March 11th, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Francis' book on Angling was written 40 years ago. He fished the dry fly with Capt. Marryatt, probably the greatest English dry-fly fisher that ever lived. Halford got all his early information from him, including tying flies, dyeing feathers to shade, etc. Halford, Hall, Marston and others. He must have been older than most of them. Although an old timer in a way he was an all-round fisher, who had visited all the best trout and salmon waters in England, Scotland and Ireland. There is much good stuff in his book and I will send it to you to read. It is an old fly-dresser copy I picked up at second hand.

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

I nearly coughed my head off from a tickling in my throat. Could not stop it for hours.

THEODORE GORDON

P.S. Francis Francis has been quoted by nearly every one who has written on fishing.

Bradley, March 12, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Some of my friends are asking me to buy baits and rods for them, and I am glad to do it. I enjoy it. I enjoy one little new rod very much. There is something fascinating about a very small dainty fly rod and you like to handle and fiddle with it.

Bruce LeRoy came down yesterday afternoon. He is such a good fellow, and he found a good deal that was interesting in my little collection of stuff. Gave him some things that he would hardly remember himself.

I will have a line for Christian that he can not break with a fish on, on the biggest lakes in Sullivan Co. Pull its head off first.

Beautiful day.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, March 12th, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

There is a fly with white tipped turkey wings and black and yellow ringed body that is a great favorite in the west and northwest. It is called the McGinty. A big one does well on the Nepigon.

A man in New York has sent me his theories in regard to construction of a set of flies to be far better than anything now used . . . :

BODY	HACKLE	WING
1. Black	Black	Wood Duck
2. Blue	(Blue gray) Blue	" "
3. Olive	Brown	" "
4. Dark Red	Red or Brown	" "
5. White	Light Brown	" "

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

### For Old Patterns

- |                    |   |  |
|--------------------|---|--|
| 6. Quill Gordon    | } | And he thinks the above is original and will make flies better than any we have now. |
| 7. Rockland Cahill |   |  |
| 8. Catskill.       |   |  |

The theorist without much experience is a dangerous person. The great experts who have helped have studied and worked and fished for many, many years before they began to instruct others. Our friend above wants one of the rarest feathers we now have in all his flies.

THEODORE GORDON

P.S. We pick up a good deal in reading but mostly we are led to try things, and the results of our own experience count.

La Branch and Hewitt declare that they would be content to go through a season with *one* fly. And that is all right, probably, *where they fish*. There are other waters where they would find themselves stuck without small flies and a small range of colors. If I had not bought from an old angler who was incapacitated by rheumatism, my delightful week at Bellefonte years ago would have been spoiled. The first killing fly I remember was a very tiny black with a thin body. Nothing else took that day.

A very pale yellow was good often. There were two stores where they sold good flies from Kriebers; one had the yellow required, the other had a yellow bordering on orange and was no use. A very small black gnat was good in the evening. Large flies were worthless. There was much slow water.

THEODORE GORDON

Saturday, March 13, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

It is a splendid day. If only I had a good place to cast, I could decide on rod in 10 minutes. One thing may compel me to take the  $3\frac{5}{8}$  oz. rod. The action approximates my 9 footer that 16 friends gave me 3 years ago, and I can turn from one rod to the other much easier than if I keep the  $3\text{-}7/16$  oz. rod. The difference is not great. Of course there is no comparison in power and ability between the 9 foot  $5\frac{1}{4}$  oz. and the  $3\frac{5}{8}$  oz. rod. Sometimes when I feel weak I don't think it

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

matters much. I could not fish the Neversink in my present condition.

Anyhow, I must find the *easiest* fishing I can this year.

THEODORE GORDON

Sunday, March 14, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Christian came up this morning and I think enjoyed fussing with things, and I gave him some useful stuff. It is a remarkably fine day and the remains of snow has gone fast in the open. . . .

I hope that you and Bruce will get to the lake early. The best time on all lakes for *lake* trout is soon after the ice goes out, but is apt to be cold to row in a boat on the water. However, it is the time to get the fish. Those Christian killed were solid heavy chaps, just like lead in the hand and simply crammed with food, although it was so early in April. He lost his best fish, owing to his friend catching the line on the side of the boat and breaking it. . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, March 17th, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Would it involve much trouble to photograph the enclosed salmon fly? It (the fly) was given me by that splendid old salmon fisher Wm. Neyle Habersham, of Georgia. He fished the Restigouche, Miramichi, and Nipissiquit for 50 years and did not give up until just before he died. The last time he rushed up to the lower Restigouche as soon as the river watcher wired him that the ice had gone out. He was past 80 but a splendid specimen of an old man, white hair, but fine ruddy complexion. He left Georgia in summer warmth and was dumped out at the bridge in a snow bank. Next day he went fishing in the big water, in a leaky canoe, with two Indians. Caught one 25 lb. salmon and a very bad cold. Had to go to bed and was sent home at once. Don't think he recovered from that last trip entirely.

THEODORE GORDON

Am sorry I have only a double hook fly. It was tied by Forest of Kelso, in the Tweed, after a compound of three flies with which Mr. Habersham was very successful—called the Habersham.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN.

March 7th, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . I got that extraordinary Red Fly spinner of Hildebrants as a curiosity. I now find that it is for mascollange. I never saw such a monstrosity. A very large hook, point up, two stiff red feathers for wings and a bright composition body of some hard material. A long narrow spinner after it.

When I get the tin boxes exchanged and everything in place, I will have a good sensible arrangement of stuff. I have been writing on my knee since I had cold in my stomach; I am enjoying my rods and bait so much. I sent my 9 foot Tournament rod down to Mill's for varnishing and fixing. Tip ferules require to be tightened.

THEODORE GORDON

March 18, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I do wish that "Dry Fly Fishing in Border Waters" would come. I think that it would interest us both as it is about fishing the floating fly on rough mountain streams in the North of England and Scotland. I want to see how the Scotsmen do it, and what they have learned *by themselves*.

John James Hardy, in spite of the great casts he has made, never casts over hand and prefers a rod with considerable play.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y., March 19, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Last year Mr. Marston sent me two sheets of hackles arranged by one of his daughters (I wish I had one), Andalusian hackles on one and a sort of ginger on the other. It is beautifully done. A little help of this sort is delightful. . . .

I have some very interesting flies tied for me by Mr. F. M. Halford with his own hands in 1891 which I will show you first chance I get.

The English dry-fly man does not require a neat variety in materials. His flies are all small and the wings of a few birds like the starling are used on many of them. Landrail is another. They dye or

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

use Wood duck, Egyptian goose, or Rouen drake for May fly wings.  
I don't like Mr. Halford's most recent dyed patterns.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y., March 19th, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . A year and a half ago Gordon [LeRoy] gave me a very nice muskrat skin and a few weeks ago I cut it up to share with friends. I consider it far better than English water rat fur, and easier worked. Mole's fur is extremely short in fibre and very dark when wet. I had to give up the skin and look for an old envelope of fur.

I glance at Francis' "A Book on Angling" when I have time. . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, March 20, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

For many years I have been tormented by the difficulties in buying good tinsel. I have had to use Christmas tree and German stuff. Don't ask me to get tinsel for you, it makes me mad to think of the stuff. Probably that which White of Ornagh, Ireland, sells is as good as any, but twice a man in Columbus, Ohio, has sent me splendid tinsel, just *short scraps* on a piece of pasteboard. . . .

I am fond of making midges occasionally and some time ago treated myself to a new vise said to be perfection for small flies. It is absolutely worthless as the jaws do not fit together. It will not hold any sort of hook securely. . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, Saturday, March 20, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

So far I have seen no one taking the places of such men as Halford in writing articles, but they will turn up. They should appear during the fishing and I must try to stand for 3 months more of the *Field*, tho I have been extravagant enough already.

It is very bad to become so sensitive, and you must try to find out the cause. See if it is anything like a draught where you work or sit.



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Seems to me that the doctor should be able to tell you if it comes from a weakness anywhere or catarrhal trouble (this often makes me take cold continually in changeable weather).

I am astonished at the slimness of the information possessed by men who have gone to splendid fishing every year for years. They have had experience of a sort but everything has been done for them; they have been told what to do, directed where to cast, and generally attended until they know nothing of themselves. I strike blank walls of non-comprehension quite frequently. Yet a man who knows anything about trout fly fishing on large streams can readily adjust himself to salmon fishing.

A novice who knows nothing can buy a copy of *The American Salmon Fisher* by Mills for \$1.50, which will instruct him thoroughly and then he must learn the practical, get the experience. They think a lot of that book in England, I see. It is constantly advertised, tho written years ago.

THEODORE GORDON

P.S. Every afternoon the time drags until my mail arrives with latest reports from South Orange. Then I enjoy my mail and anything that comes in a box. It has been a blessed diversion, buying those tyings, but I have spent more money than I intended, particularly in reels. . . .

The very best pickerel bait which I have been looking for, for a long time, is in Von L and A's catalogue (at least it looks right), but they are of course out of it, and do not know when they will have it. It has two attractions before the bait, fly or feathers, and to get those right is difficult. I have seen a man take pickerel with a good bait of this sort when no one else could hook a fish. What do you think of Robt. Page Lincoln's writings? He has written very voluminously during the last two or three years, and has certainly improved a great deal.

Rhead is such a copyist that I have doubts about him.

I think that I have found a most useful article. You know how it is when you visit a strange lake and find one dirty old boat without anchor or rope? Well, Von L and A, Chicago, advertise a trolley anchor weighing only one pound that will anchor boat. All one will

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

have to do will be to carry a couple and a strong heavy fish line, and you are prepared. I ordered 3 of them as they are so cheap.

The fat lady has had a bad grouch for a week, so before supper I left my bottle of whiskey, which I never use, at her place and two wine glasses and begged her to take a good one. Then I went upstairs. The nice young man says that she took *two* good ones, one for herself and one for him. It did her a whole lot of good. . . . But it's a fine prescription for a fat woman who eats too much and gets a grouch. . . .

T. G.

Bradley, March 21st, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I am very sorry that the frog hook that struck my fancy is too large. It is light, they say, for big mouths in the Western lakes, but they must use bigger frogs than we ever did for small mouth bass. My fishing in Orange and Rockland Cos. was with fly or still fishing. We had a regular bait farm as the bass were hard to suit, and began fishing with 3 hooks on a 9 foot leader and three baits, say a frog, a bull-granite and crawfish. I remember once at little Twin Lake, Gordon [cousin—Ed.] took 9 fine bass after trying them several days with all other baits with crickets. Then they quit crickets.

I received Bruce Le Roy's baits and they are beautiful. The Pearl Wobblers for lake trout are the best I have ever seen. . . .

I rigged up one large gold spoon with a Red Fly, to lend to Bruce if he goes for lake trout and I have other things, to give variety. At first sizes gave me a good deal of trouble. I have a fancy for a bait called the Kent floater, like a frog without hind legs, beautifully enamelled and only 50 cents. I had some trouble in getting two, one of them for Bruce. It is finely made. . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Sunday, 21 March, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . I think my little collection is really quite interesting and I have gradually condensed things, cut out boxes and wrappers until practically the whole goes into the two tin boxes.

THEODORE GORDON

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

23rd March, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

No two of the books that give lists of flies, or the few that have colored illustrations agree with each other. Yet in a general way they will post you up on old patterns, etc. I prefer formulas to illustrations (except in Mrs. Marbury's book, *Favorite Flies*. The last is good on bass and big lake flies, and coloring is all right). The illustrations are rarely such that you can get the colors of the original flies from them.

For some years we have had easy, clear instructions, with illustrations of almost every turn of the silk but when I taught myself to tie flies, the older books were full of involved senseless instructions that mystified one. There is not the slightest doubt that the older school of writers tried to make flytying a most difficult and complicated art. A beautiful book was given me in colors, "The Whole Art of Fly Making, Dyeing, etc." for trout and salmon. A. Blacker, a professional and tackle maker, was the author. There is no doubt that he could tie flies. Some of his big, gorgeous salmon flies sold, they say, for a guinea apiece (say \$3.00), but more rotten instructions were never written. He wanted his readers to come to his shop and pay a high price for instructions. . . .

THEODORE GORDON

March 24, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . Metal bodies are perfectly useless, that is *as metal bodied flies*, if they are not bright and will not shine by reflected light from the sun. Same with both Wickhams, Silver Doctors, and all the remainder of them. I have just a few of my old salmon flies on hand, and in spite of the fact that I paid the highest prices, the silver tinsel is dull and tarnished and my flies on which I worked so carefully make no show and have lost much of their beauty. I notice that several by Forrest of Kelso have held their tinsels quite well. They tie the best fly for America and their patterns are always full, have all the beautiful feathers called for in the formula. Do you think that you could go George M. Kelson's big book "The Salmon Fly"? It is illustrated to a considerable extent. Has excellent instructions and is full

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

of the most wonderful notions, but he has been a great salmon fisher for 50 years and is master of all the wonderful casts. He also has the best stock of materials in England.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, March 24th, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I sent one man to James Ogden to have flies copied. He did it well (his Fly Deft did) but crushed all the flies flat. He did not get another order, yet the flies would have come out all right. Holland was the greatest tyer of floaters but I can not find out his end. Probably drank himself out of business, as that was his weakness. Mr. Halford would have had a tough time getting up his new patterns in 1904 without Holland and his son. They supplied everything, dyed everything and tied the flies over and over again, until they got the colors to match that of the natural flies.

I have decided to send you "The Salmon Fly" to read certain portions, particularly the informative ones about fly tying. Remember that Kelson, with all his romancing, is a great master of salmon fly fishing and salmon fly dressing and is amply fitted to instruct.

Don't keep the book too long. I have so very few now that I am nervous about them. A number of my books have never been returned. C. M. never returned "Field, Cover and Trap Shooting" by Bogardus, a book I had owned since I was a little boy.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y., March 24th, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Last Fall Mr. Marston heard that Kelson ["The Salmon Fly"] was selling copies with damaged binding at reduced prices (according to damage) and bought a copy at half price and sent it to me.

I was greatly pleased, and had much amusement reading the book. At the time of publication the criticisms were delightful. He is so conceited that Mr. Marston and other editors wrote in a comic vein, but everybody knows his great abilities as a salmon fisher and fly maker. But he left out most of the well known popular favorites and

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

described and illustrated flies that no salmon fisher ever used or saw. He did not even mention the Silver Doctor.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y., March 25, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I will send you the "Favorite Flies and their Histories" [Mrs. Marbury] in about two days. I want a small share in your buying it, as I think you will take much pleasure in the book. Do not send back the 3 books next week. I only object when men keep my books a year or more and then forget to return them. I am judging you by myself on "Favorite Flies." It is a *very heavy*, handsome book (the devil in a trunk), yet I hauled it about with me for years. I enjoyed the many quotations with which I was familiar and the letters from all parts of the country on fly fishing, and the favorite flies used by the writers who wrote for the book at Mrs. Marbury's request. It is largely trout fishing in every state where trout exist, but also on black bass and black bass flies. The amount of information is really remarkable. I know that the plates are true to the original flies, as I saw all the latter mounted on frames for exhibition. I even remember a couple of errors in colors, but they are mostly very true to the feathers used of all sorts. They break down when trying to tie [from the] Halford flies, but all the wet flies can easily be dressed dry-fly fashion, as you know. I would have grabbed the book at once for you (I really wanted it) but I am heavily weighed already and my collection of baits has in February and March knocked spots out of my bank account. I had no notion that trifling amounts could total so much. . . .

THEODORE GORDON

March 26, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

Years ago I tied a few rough pig's wool body flies for Bruce, and they did well wet in the spring, always good for big fish.

Christian got on to them three years ago and I supplied them. Now he can make them for himself. Learned this winter. All his big trout were killed on these flies except those on floaters, and in day-

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

time also, practically all the larger trout. The body is very rough and dirty yellow wood duck wing. It is certainly a remarkable fly in some hands, but I have not fished wet fly at all, so have not tried it.

THEODORE GORDON

March 28, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

The mere study of materials is endless and I often use things that are not mentioned in the books, if they will produce the effect desired. I tied a few of George Cooper's fly, half with the egg sack he uses, and half with a very pretty bright yellow silk.

A very good angler sent me this list last Fall, Whirling Dun, March Brown, Beaverkill, Wickham, Light and Dark Cahill, Quill Gordon, Female Beaverkill, Royal Coachman, Bonnie View. He has fished the Beaverkill probably 20 years and the Esopus a good deal for the past 5 or 6 years. Is a good all around fisherman.

If you intend to fish "wet" at all I will send you a pattern of the rough body fly [Pig's Wool?—Ed.] that has killed so many large trout. No. 8 for spring, and 6 or even 4 for summer nights.

THEODORE GORDON

March 31, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

One of the funny things that fishermen do is to try to tell me what to make my flies of. They would soon have me tying flies of the cheapest stuff, such as one finds in the flies costing 3 to 5 cents each in the country.

It is a trifle annoying when I use some of the most expensive salmon fly materials in order to produce an effect.

The very pale Mayfly body was the lightest possible yellow, the wings very light with faint markings on them. The fly appeared large on the stream and the trail allowed very few to escape. I kept getting it lighter in color but tried to preserve the bright look. So I added a tail of the biggest, strongest, and most expensive crests I had. The fly was very handsome, both the natural and artificial. Halsey says that he has not seen it for a long time, but that there has been a lot

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

of a smaller and darker yellow fly. I have not had a call for one in several years. Mr. Bogart sent me a nice wet fly with which he had had success on the B'kill last Spring. He used them up except this one but did not know what it was made of. I saw that it was a fancy Irish lake fly, partridge wings, Jan throat, brown hackle, rough yellow body and piece of small crest for tail. I have sent him little I had.

THEODORE GORDON

April 2, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

It is curious how ways and habits change. 20 to 25 years ago the two-handed fly-rod men (trout rods) were in the majority in England, Scotland and Ireland. And Mr. Halford, about 1890, had an article in the *Field* giving his reasons for preferring the single-handed fly rod of about 10 feet. But there are far more 14 foot trout rods in use over there today than we have any notion of. They are preferred by many for all lake and big stream fishing, particularly for sea trout. The majority, however, is in form of the short light rod, built as near as I can make out in imitation of our stiff dry-fly rods. . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Thursday, April 8, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

As you want my vote on the two best dry-fly rods, 9 and 9½ feet, I cast mine without hesitation for the 9½ foot. It is a wonderful weapon for the money. If I was selecting for my own use I would have to take the 9 foot 5 oz. Independent handle. I am not strong enough for anything bigger nowadays, but you are an active, strong man, who will soon get accustomed to the heavier weapon.

I consider the 9 footer as perfect as the other, but it might not make the long casts you wish to make. I am so no account physically at present that it is very hard for me to judge. I have fished fly rods of 9½ to 10 ft. 3 inches (the latter 10 oz.) without undue fatigue, and all day, but man, I couldn't stand 2 hours of it now. I must go in for easy things.

THEODORE GORDON

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, Thursday, April 8, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

It is now 2 o'clock p.m. and a lovely day, but no Mr. Steenrod. I fear that you can not get away for reasons unknown. . . . I received a present from Mr. Marston, that pleases me where I am soft. An old edition of one of Halford's books that was given to Mr. M. by Mr. H. many years ago (it looks like new) with autograph letters from Halford and Marston. Mr. Marston surely knows how to gratify me. I am bound that he shall have the finest baits for a big Irish pike that I can find in the U. S. . . .

Of course, he has the large gold spoon and the big Red Ibis (the latter I put on for a finish) but this he wanted to try on English pike, near home. The Irish lakes hold probably the largest pike in the United Kingdom. Twenty pounds is not at all unusual and they run up in the 30's, but no 50-pound fish, for which Mr. Marston had been offering a reward for many years. . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Friday, April 9th, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

My mind is entirely relieved in regard to your selection. The 9½ foot rod is the one for you, beyond a doubt. The tendency has been so strong recently toward the 9 foot that I feared it might influence you, and you had the light rod habit.

THEODORE GORDON

Sunday evening, April 11, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

After you were gone there were so many things I wished to show you. After my tea I braced right up and I remembered everything. It is exasperating when one misses entertaining a good friend. I will send the book "Dry Fly Fishing," by Fernie, in by Knight the first time he goes. It is quite good.

Christian had a fly or two he intended to show but did not. It is of no consequence. Really any one can tie a fly if they put their hands to it. It is a minor art, and depends on color sense and experience.



## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

I noticed that in a big Aberdeen house (Playfair) which ships great quantities of flies to this country, four fly makers produced different shades on the same fly. They differed considerably in the body.

Mr. Skues wrote me that at the Club in London one evening, identically the same materials were given out to 11 amateurs and each was told to dress a March Brown on the same size hook. He said that the difference in patterns produced was very amusing and astonished all hands. . . .

Some time remind me to show you the lot of flies tied for me by the F. M. Halford in 1891. They are beautifully done, and cover the whole range of Ephemeridae, Caddis (Sedges), etc. A chalk stream has not the quantities of perlidae, caddis and other flies of that sort, that rough mountain rivers have. That is one reason why Leonard West is so good. He does not feature the ephemera so strongly. His book is really a useful one. . . .

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, April 11th, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I sent Mr. Marston the big Hildebrandt Gold Spoon he wished to try on English pike, of course, but ever since I got a Montauk Spinner I have wanted to send him another bait, a combination of the Montauk, with a real white bucktail "bob," armed with two large trebles. If it doesn't make their big Irish pike sit up and take notice I don't know what will. The "bob" is a deadly bait by itself, but when you add the brilliant spin and effects of the Montauk you have a great combination. I speak of Ireland, because fishing in the big lakes is all free and they have such large numbers of big pike. After the trout season is over many English fishermen cross over for the pike, as the fishing is at its best then. They get the loveliest, fattest trout in mayfly time, and lots of folks dap for them from boats with long rods and a light line that is carried out by the breeze.

A year or two ago some great sport was reported on these lakes in dead calms with floating flies and I saw a fine little photograph showing a tray holding a Mr. Hinchcliff's catch of trout with *wet fly*. Such fish! The shape is lovely. The largest weighs *ten* pounds and three or

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

four remaining are one and two pounds each. He has done things with wet fly, with dap and with floating flies. An all-around angler.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, April 11th, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . It is most curious that the book Mr. Marston presented to me has never been cut. I presume that Mr. Halford gave it to him in 1889 but the leaves are all fast and it can not be read. . . . I will send in the book I waited for so long, Fernie on "Dry Fly Fishing on Broader Streams" (Scotland, etc.). It is interesting and good but I like free references to a man's own experience, everything he has seen and done. Nice little yarns of the killing of large trout and such matters. Yet this book is very good and the only one of the kind published.

THEODORE GORDON

Monday, April 12, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . I have tied a few flies but could not do much on a/c of the throat worrying me. . . . I wonder how Christian got those 16 trout? He used to be very strong with the minnow, and I know they will not rise as long as there is snow water in the streams.

I would like to do so many things in May and June and may not have strength for any. I was clear of weakness in March for ten days but caught cold and it came back.

THEODORE GORDON

April 12, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . Orange I find is usually strong, but any of the fine silks lose strength when exposed to the air, and particularly to sunlight. I wish that I could learn the trick of bleaching dark small quill feathers to palest hues for pale evening duns and such flies. I got a sample of a Gen'l Sir Baden-Powell fly called the Blue Jacket this afternoon but it had been crowded on a No. 10 hook for early trout fishing and was much spoiled. It is a very pretty bright salmon fly, but tied small for sea and lake trout.

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

Embossed silver tinsel body, bright, light blue hackle, scrap of crest for tail, jay and two bits of crest in wing. It should be on a No. 6 at the least, and then it would come out nicely. It belongs to a series of 6 salmon and sea trout flies, designed by Gen'l Sir Baden-Powell some years ago. I would like to see the other five patterns.

THEODORE GORDON

Thursday, April 15, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

The dyed gut (2 hands) I sent have to be softened with water before being wound on. It makes a brilliant body. If you can dye well, you can have any color you wish. The Coots are plentiful, I suppose, but you never can get any. So I have saved what I could and lend you some. You can make them do duty for wings, hackles and other purposes. I have been driven to use queer stuff, weak, soft, kingfisher, for instance, for hackles for one of the Grannoms, but the fly killed, tho of course it would not float.

Take care of yourself. I feel better tonight but from lunch time yesterday when I caught cold I have been feeling pretty mean.

THEODORE GORDON

April 15, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I laughed at the Devon minnow Hardy Bro. sent me and so would any bass. Why, one of the last bass I caught on the fly did not exceed  $1\frac{1}{4}$  lbs. in weight, yet it disgorged a sharp spined catfish 5 inches long. It is great sport to kill even bass of that sort in a river with fly tackle, but the rewards are not great. I fished about 2 hours from time sun went behind the mountains, and the best I did was 5 bass, and not a real large fish among them.

I have the largest lot of flies about completed. I shipped a little box to Mr. H. B. Marshall, Greenwich, Conn., on April 1st. Can you trace for delivery? I have not heard from him and I fancy he is ill or something. The work has been accomplished with so much difficulty that it seems very important. You know how it is!

I am still fighting to buy the gold wire. I sent Mills two splendid

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

bridge rings of file proof steel for the big fly rod. When you get it from the Halls just send it on to Mills. It has never been varnished since it was purchased in 1891. It is a big rather soft stout rod, no more fit for dry-fly fishing to my mind than a coach whip.

THEODORE GORDON

April 20th, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I was very glad to find that orange tying silk. It is the very best I have seen in years. I got a little pot of green, you know, and Tunis put a coat of paint on the tin (aluminum) case of the 8 ft. rod. Had to pay Tournament prices. It is very handsome at night. Don't know how it will appear by day. *Recreation* says it will make a cut of the salmon fly, "The Habersham," use it and give me the cut afterwards; only they want a few words with the fly. This is just what I wanted; I wished to make a little record for one of the oldest and most enthusiastic of American salmon fishers. At one time . . . he was wealthy and owned outright some of the best pools belonging now to the Restigouche Salmon Club. Archibald Rogers bought them from him for \$3,000, and refused \$30,000 a few years later. Then he fished the Miramachce and Nepessiquit and everywhere he went he made friends. He went to New Brunswick every year and was as crazy about salmon fishing at 80 years as he was 40 years earlier. A fine old sportsman and well known on these salmon rivers for a great many years. I will have quite a hunt for the photograph of the Habersham as I do not remember where I bestowed it.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, April 20, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

. . . I have been trying to fix things so that I can do a little dyeing. I got Halford's special dyes two years ago. They do run so horribly to olives, olives of all shades and very few of any other color. The "Diamond" dyes produce very good results, but I know precious little about dyeing, only there are just a few things that one must have.

THEODORE GORDON

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

April 21, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I was very late this morning and missed the mail with quite half of my letters.

. . . I hope that you have had opportunity to go a-fishing this week. It seems to be an early season. Christian's getting those 26 trout on wet fly shows that they are beginning to rise.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y., April 28th, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I hope that I wrote to you very early this morning in an intelligible manner. I felt particularly dull and sleepy. It seemed so important to get a suitable covering for my feet in the rooms. The heavy leather slippers over a tight stocking check the circulation of the blood. A pretty crocheted slipper would be comfortable and yield to every movement. I increased the swelling in feet and ankles by not going to bed regularly one night and keeping slippers on.

The combination of the old Southern "bob" with gold spoons of various sizes makes a splendid combination of two baits that were good alone. The old Southern "bob" was great medicine for big mouth bass before modern baits were thought of.

I had breakfast in bed, a great comfort. Mrs. Knight is so quick that she makes light of things.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y., April 28th, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I slept in my *leather* slippers night before last which caused the feet to swell. I must have something that yields and is comfortable. Do the best you can for me, a crocheted pair in blue, for instance, as they are used in my room. The great point is to have them *yielding*. Please send them out this afternoon. I am writing this sitting up in bed. I had got a fresh lot of stamps today, but could not find them. This cold was accompanied by the catarrh symptoms quite badly. Let

## THE LETTERS OF THEODORE GORDON

me know what sport you have in the Willowemoc. It is not yet 4 o'clock in the morning.

THEODORE GORDON

Bradley, N. Y., April 28th, 1915

DEAR MR. STEENROD:

I hope you received your rod ere this, as in a letter I had from Albert Orvis he said that it would be sent as soon as the varnish was dry. There were two colors that had to be harmonized, as I understand it. I am so dull where mechanics are concerned. I think that Miss Haus in Aberdeen was very lucky to get a new copy of "Favorite Flies and Their Histories." I could not find a copy of the book in New York even with help of the various editors of outdoor magazines. Albert Orvis got me the last copy which you shipped to Aberdeen.

I am very no account until this swelling goes down. Must keep my feet comfortable and not too warm. Mr. Spencer [a cousin.—Ed.] is to get me some socks thinner and larger.

THEODORE GORDON





# A P P E N D I X





## PASSING OF A NOTED ANGLER AUTHOR

THEODORE GORDON, ONE OF THE FAMOUS AUTHORITIES ON TROUT FISHING, ANSWERS THE LAST CALL

F. S. [ON SATURDAY, MAY 1, 1915, in the little hamlet  
June, 1915 of Bradley, in Sullivan County, New York, on the  
beautiful and renowned Neversink River, a stream  
which he loved devotedly and of which he had written much that was  
beautiful, Theodore Gordon, famous as a contributor to *Forest and  
Stream* and other publications, passed away.

Theodore Gordon was born in Pittsburgh, Pa., on September 18, 1854, and was in his sixty-first year at the time of his death. On account of poor health he had spent the greater part of the past thirty-five years on and near the streams Neversink, Beaverkill and Willowemoc, in Sullivan County, N. Y. He not only was an ardent and expert fisherman but was also without a doubt the most proficient flytier in the United States, having made a life study of this art. He was a man known by nearly all the trout fishermen of the United States and by many in Great Britain.

Writing of the lamented death of one of the most notable authorities on fishing and outdoor sports in America, a friend living near Liberty, New York, says:

"I knew Mr. Gordon for years and have spent much time with him. Always I found him most courteous and eager for new suggestions on fly-tying and experiences on the streams. In the death of Theodore Gordon the world has lost a man who was loved by all who knew him, a man with fifty years of experience which he was always eager to give to his friends."

This little eulogy is not overdrawn. Readers of *Forest and Stream* who for many years have been familiar with Mr. Gordon's writings will feel a personal loss in his death. He leaves a vacancy which it will be difficult to fill, but a memory which will live as long as the gentle sport of angling exists.

*Forest and Stream* makes some apology for presenting in this

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

article the only portrait of Mr. Gordon that could be obtained. It was taken twenty-five years ago, in Savannah, Ga., and shows the subject a younger man, although the general features are easily recognizable.

### DEATH OF MR. THEODORE GORDON

F. G. [IT WAS VERY sad news that I got in the following  
MAY 22, 1915 letter from Mr. W. T. Williams, of Lebanon, U. S. A.,  
telling me of the death of my old and very friendly  
American correspondent, Mr. Theodore Gordon, which took place  
on May 1, 1915. Mr. Williams writes:—

“Lebanon, Pa.,

“Wednesday, May 5, 1915, 7 p.m.

“MY DEAR MR. MARSTON,—It grieves me much to hasten to tell you of the departure from this world of Brother Theodore Gordon, who died last Saturday, May 1, 1915. I just learned this through a New York lawyer. I was corresponding all the time with Theodore. His last letter of recent date complained very much of his health. He feared greatly that his fishing days were over. He died with a complication of diseases; among them were rheumatism, etc. He was the leading authority in this country on angling matters. He was a fine spirit to be with, unmarried, and leaves a sick widowed mother.

“W. T. WILLIAMS.”

In the *Fishing Gazette* of January 15, 1910, I gave Mr. Theodore Gordon's portrait and a note from him speaking so finely of his favourite dog that it appeals to all dog lovers, and indirectly tells us something of the man also. Nearly every month or oftener I received a cheery letter from Mr. Gordon, very often enclosing some fly or fly material. He told me he corresponded with many *Fishing Gazette* correspondents and others he had got into communication with through the *Fishing Gazette*, including Mr. F. M. Halford and “Val Conson.” I believe it was his “American Notes” in the *Fishing Gazette* which first made him known in America, and he became a frequent contributor to *Forest and Stream*, the *American Field*, etc. He was, I

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believe, the first American angler to take up, if not dry-fly fishing, at any rate the making of floating flies, and he certainly was the first American to dress flies according to our best authorities, Halford, "Val Conson" (G. E. M. Skues), etc., and he made excellent flies with which I have often done well on our British waters.

Anglers will feel keen sympathy with Mr. Gordon's widowed mother; in almost every letter he refers to his anxiety on account of her state of health. I hope that some day some American angler who knew him well will collect his writings into a book. I know, for instance, that three years ago sixteen friends presented him with a very fine "Leonard" dry-fly rod. He had bought rods of British makers, including Messrs. Hardy, and spoke most highly of them. I never knew an angler who was more ready to give information, and it was always a pleasure to exchange notes and fly materials with him.

### A NOTE FROM "VAL CONSON"

"MY DEAR MARSTON,—It is with sincere sorrow that I had from you to-day, and from two sources in the U. S. A., the announcement of the death on May 1 of Theodore Gordon. I have corresponded with many angling enthusiasts, but never with any so persistent and so enthusiastic as he. I have in my desk shoals of his letters, all of them until this war broke out, from first to last on angling and fly-dressing subjects. He wrote to me first in the early nineties through you, and with brief intermissions the correspondence continued to actually the day before his death, for he left behind him a sealed letter addressed to me dated April 30, which arrived after I had had your intimation. I think he must have been one of the most generous of men, for seldom did I have a letter from him that had not some little gift in it—a batch of summer duck breast feathers, samples of American woodcock hackles, or offers of some American squirrel or fox or hare. He seems to have tied flies for a host of correspondents in all parts of the States, and greatly appreciated the praises which their killing properties earned him. He was always on the look-out for materials; but, in spite of the wider range of bird and animal life over there, he had to refer to England for the best of his stuff. I fear he was often disap-

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

pointed through inability to pick exactly what he wanted. Last year was a wonderful spring for ginger and red hackles. I never found so many of great length and of such excellent shape and condition, and I was able to ship him some beautiful necks from Leadenhall. But he was still questing for more material to the last, to tie flies for others to use. I was trying only the other day, but unsuccessfully, to get him a good jungle cock neck. He was busy during the last year in an effort to evolve the best type of rod for the angler who could afford only one fly rod of good quality at a fair but not extravagant price. He was still questing, I think, when he was called away to the other side, and was comparing the work of other makers with a priceless Leonard dry-fly rod just made for him by Messrs. Mills and Son, of New York. I am afraid he had used it but little, if at all. He was, as you know, a frequent contributor to the angling press in the United States and here, and had a knack of being interesting on a variety of phases of his sport. R.I.P.”]

### GEORGE LA BRANCHE ON THEODORE GORDON'S DEATH

F. G. MR. GEO. M. L. La Branche, the well-known Amer-  
JUNE 5, 1915 ican angler and angling writer, sends me this nice  
letter about our mutual friend the late Mr. Theodore  
Gordon. Yes, I hope, too, in the happy fishing grounds behind the  
beyond.—R. B. M.

“New York, May 15, 1915.

“MY DEAR MR. MARSTON,—Isn't life the most uncertain of all things? To-day was the day fixed for a trip to the Neversink to fish a few days with my dear old friend Theodore Gordon, and instead I am writing you of his untimely death.

“Although Mr. Gordon had been ill for a long time, he passed away very unexpectedly—so suddenly, in fact, that no one was notified but his immediate relatives for three or four days. I am sure that many readers of the *Fishing Gazette* will miss his ‘Occasional Notes,’ written, as they plainly were, by a lover of the woods and waters and of fly-fishing.

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"I think that Mr. Gordon was, perhaps, the greatest student of fly-fishing in this country, and without exception the best flytier I have ever known.

"He lived on the banks of the Neversink, in Sullivan Co., N. Y., and made the most of his opportunities to study trout and the insects upon which they feed. He was very successful with big fish, and often planned a campaign for two or three days before actually trying for some particular fish he had marked down—and as a rule he took the fish.

"His imitations of the natural insect were about as perfect as human hands could make them, and he was a strong believer in the efficacy of colour.

"I think, however, in the last few years he was more inclined to a representation of the fly as it appeared on the water, paying more attention to the size and form of the fly than to exact shades or tints, but he could never quite abandon his ideas of some colour imitation.

"I had hoped that he would give his ideas to the fly-fishing public in permanent form, but it seems that was not to be during his lifetime.

"He wrote me some time ago that he had a manuscript which he was going to send me to read, but he never sent it. If his relatives will let me have it I will see that it is published—published as a fitting memoriam of a fine fly-fisherman and dear friend, as well as for the benefit of those who will follow us and learn to love the trout stream.

"In the great beyond there must be some little corner where anglers are tucked away, where one may hope to meet his streamside associates, and discuss again the old, old theories and experiences—at any rate, I believe there is such a place, that my friend Gordon is there now, and is rigidly reserving a seat next to his for me."

## THE COMPLETE FLY FISHERMAN

### HALFORD TO GORDON

The letter accompanying the set of Halford flies from which Gordon designed the American imitation dry fly.

35 Inverness Terrace  
Hyde Park W  
February 22, 1890

DEAR SIR:

You must excuse my delay in replying to your favour of the 15th ult.

I can quite imagine that in some parts of your country fish could be taken with dry fly where the more usual sunk fly would be of no avail—my difficulty however as to advising you of patterns likely to be successful is chiefly due to the fact that I have no knowledge of the streams or lakes nor of the genera and species of natural fly prevalent in them—hence I have thought it better to send you a few of the flies I use myself as patterns rather than order here what might prove after all useless to you—knowing your own rivers you can then select the patterns which seem likely and dress them yourself or order in the U. S.—if you prefer to have them dressed here and want my advice as to the best dresser I should recommend you giving your order to Mr. G. Holland—Bridge Street—Salisbury. If you tell him that the patterns were dressed for and by me and give the name he would be able to send you exactly what you wanted—in all cases however give him the size of hook and to assist you in this I have enclosed a set of the original size from 000 to 4. (Edit.—English system.) The shape of the hooks now made by Hutchison are to my mind an improvement on the original one as designed by my friend Mr. Hall—being more of the *Sneck Bend*. Any of the winged patterns can be dressed buzz or hackle only.

If you should be unsuccessful with the floating flies or in doubt as to patterns please try and collect a few of the natural insects in spirit and send them to me by post and if I can dress imitations I will—a tube about 3" x 1" corked, quite full of methylated spirit packed with cotton wool in a small block of wood bored out to receive the tube will

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travel all over the world by post—of course the color does fade to a certain degree even in spirit but from experience I think I could allow for this and possibly even might know the genera and species—

If I can be of any further assistance to you pray write and in any case kindly let me know the result of your experiments—

With kind regards,

Yours faithfully

FREDERIC M. HALFORD

THEODORE GORDON, ESQ.







**This book must be returned within 3, 7, 14 days of its issue. A fine of ONE ANNA per day will be charged if the book is overdue.**

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